

When the Cold Wind is a Callin'

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Summary: Winter has come to Berk, and with it the annual holiday of Snoggletog. Now, Hiccup and Merida will not only find themselves having to deal with the challenges presented by Berk's newest inhabitants, but also a mysterious stranger looking for someone he believes only they can find. Sequel to the Dragon and the Bow.

1. The Holiday Season

****When the Cold Wind is a Callin'****

****Chapter 1: The Holiday Season****

The North is many things to many people. Hard. Fierce. Grim. But one word describes the North better than any other.

Cold.

Even in the dead of summer, snow still clings to the high places of the North. In winter though, cold infused the North, ice and snow blanketing forests, fields and valleys across all the various lands that made up the region, from the Highlands to the Norselands, from the Steppes in the east to Arendelle clinging to the southernmost portion.

Winter in the North was a time of hardship and this year appeared to be no different. People huddled in their homes, keeping fires burning in their hearths to stay warm, living off of the food they had been preparing and storing all year. All in all, winter was a joyless time in the North.

Except on the island of Berk. This year, winter had taken a much more positive turn.

The sun was rising in the east, the sunlight glittering off the fresh

snow that had fallen the night before as the sky turned from dark purple to a bright pink. The rising sun began to waken life on the island. Sheep began to venture from their shelters into their frozen pastures as roosters in their coops called out to greet the day. One creature in particular was more active than the others however.

Flitting through the town that occupied the area surrounding the island's one safe harbor, a long shadow dashed across the white snow, kicking up flurries in its wake. The creature looked like a giant black salamander with large, bat-like wings. Two fins grew from the end of its tail, one organic, the other a prosthetic made of cloth and metal, colored bright red with a skull drawn in white on it.

He was a Night Fury. He was a dragon.

Racing up a hill at the edge of the village, the Night Fury leapt onto a house that sat on the border of the forest that dominated much of the island. Latching his claws into the wooden walls, the Night Fury pulled himself up onto the thatch roof of the house. Growling, he began pounding on the top of the room, shaking it and causing snow to go sliding off.

The thudding echoed through the simple home, especially in the room directly below the dragon. The room was a bedroom where a young man slept. He looked about sixteen years old with shaggy auburn hair, a slim build and a pale complexion. He woke with a start as the dragon's banging shook the whole room. Grumbling, he ran a hand through his hair and turned his green eyes towards the ceiling.

"Alright! Alright!" the young man called out with a slightly nasal voice as he threw off his blanket and sat up on his bed, "I'm up!"

As he swung his legs over the side of his bed, the young man revealed that his left leg ended just below the knee. Reaching to the side of his bed, the young man grabbed a prosthetic leg made of metal and leather before strapping it onto the stub of his leg. After flexing his leg experimentally, the young man pushed himself to his feet.

Moving to his wardrobe, the young man quickly grabbed some fresh clothes and threw them on. He threw a pair of long wool underwear on under his brown trousers and covered his foot with a black wool sock before pulling on a brown leather boot. He quickly tossed on a green tunic that he tucked into his pants and strapped on a thick leather harness before throwing a brown fur coat on over all of it. As he made his way towards the door of his room, he paused to pick up a horned, iron helmet sitting next to his bed and placed it on his head.

Exiting his room, the young man closed the door behind him as movement caught his eyes. Glancing over, the young man noticed a young woman exiting her own room just down the hall from him. She was of the same age of him with a slim build and an even paler complexion. She was dressed in black wool trousers that were tucked into her leather boots along with a brown fur coat over a leather harness and a light blue tunic. She wore a dark blue, wool knit cap that contrasted with her curly, fiery red hair peaked out from under

the hat. In her hand, she carried a carved recurve bow and she had a quiver full of arrows slung over one shoulder.

"Mornin' Hiccup," the young woman greeted with a smile and a light voice thick with accent, her icy blue eyes sparkling as she looked at him.

"Moring Merida," the young man, Hiccup, replied with a smile of his own, "He wake you up too?"

"Toothless cud wake th' dead if he tried hard enough," Merida commented with a giggle. As if to answer, a roar came from outside as the roof shook again.

"He's getting' impatient," Merida observed, glancing up at the ceiling before turning her attention back to Hiccup and leaned forward, capturing his lips in a kiss. The two stayed like that for a few moments before Merida pulled back again, giggling at the goofy smile that crossed Hiccup's face.

"We shudnae keep him waitin'," Merida commented with a smirk as she walked past him.

"I suppose we shouldn't," Hiccup agreed with a chuckle as he turned around and followed Merida down the hall. At the end of the hall, Hiccup and Merida descended a flight of stairs to the first floor, which was occupied largely by a combination of a living room and a kitchen. As they reached the first floor, Merida and Hiccup came across a large man working in the kitchen.

He was a hulking man, standing tall over Merida and Hiccup with broad shoulders and a barrel chest. He had the same auburn hair as Hiccup, long enough to tie into a small ponytail. A long beard covered most of his face, the braided ends fanning across his chest. He wore a sea green tunic along with brown wool pants and wool socks over his large feet.

"Mornin'," he greeted with a deep voice as he looked at the two teens with blue eyes.

"Mornin', Stoick," Merida replied.

"Morning, Dad," Hiccup echoed with a sheepish smile, "Hope we didn't wake you up."

"I rise with the dawn, son," Stoick answered before another bang shook the house, "Though I'll be cross if that dragon of yours puts a hole in my roof."

"We'll go take care of that," Hiccup replied as he walked over to a rack where a few hooded cloaks hung. Hiccup grabbed a forest green cloak while Merida grabbed a dark blue one, each wrapping the cloaks around their shoulders and securing them with iron clasps. They then each grabbed a pair of fur-lined, leather gloves sitting on a table nearby and pulled them on. They quickly made their way out the front door, Hiccup closing the door behind them.

The cold wind cut through the two of them, causing them to shiver as they pulled their cloaks closer, Merida pulling her hood over her head for extra warmth. As they exited the house, they looked up

towards the roof of the building, where they saw the dragon looking down at them, grumbling.

"See, we're up, Toothless" Hiccup stated as he and Merida began making their way around the house, "Happy now?"

Toothless grumbled some more and made a face down at Hiccup. Hiccup smirked and made a face back at Toothless, causing Merida to laugh which the young man quickly joined in on. As they walked, the two of them suddenly stepped on a patch of ice which sent them sliding across the frozen ground. Hiccup grunted as he fell onto his back, before wheezing as Merida sat hard on his chest.

As Hiccup groaned in pain, the wind seemed to pick up around them and for a second he could hear ethereal laughter on the breeze before a snowflake floated up and landed on his nose. As the snowflake melted against his skin, a rush of joy swept over him before he started laughing. As Merida recomposed herself, she looked down at Hiccup laughing under her before a giggle crawled up her throat, quickly growing into a joyous laugh of her own. Up above them, Toothless added his own deep throated laughter to the mix as Merida stood up and carefully helped Hiccup to his feet.

"Careful now," Merida chided with a giggle, "It's a wee slippery taeday."

"Yeah, I noticed," Hiccup answered with a chuckle.

As the two made their way off of the ice patch, Toothless climbed off of the roof onto the snow-covered ground before rubbing his head against Hiccup, who smiled and pet the dragon's scales.

"Alright pal," Hiccup stated with a smile, "I take it you want to go for a fly?"

Toothless bounced up and down excitedly in response, earning a chuckle from both Hiccup and Merida.

"I'll take that as a yes," Hiccup commented with a grin, "Well, come on then; we should go get Boudica before we get the two of you saddled up."

With that, the three of them made their way around the house to where a small stable sat. As they approached the stable, they could see another dragon curled up inside. This dragon was sky blue in color, with yellow spines running down its back. Instead of having four legs like Toothless, this dragon had two, while its forelegs ended in bat-like wings with yellow claws at the corners. Its raptor-like head had a jaw full of sharp teeth that poked out from its mouth while its tail ended in a number of sharp spines. The dragon lay in a pile of hay, its wings and tail wrapped around it as it snored lightly.

As they approached the stable, a crow came flying out, cawing as it circled around Merida's head. Smiling, Merida held out her arm, offering the crow a place to land. The crow took the offer, landing on her arm before shuffling over and sitting on Merida's shoulder.

"Good mornin', Varis," Merida greeted as she reached up and stroked the crow's feathers. As she did, she noticed the dragon in the stable

perk its head up, prompting Merida's smile to grow wider.

"An' good mornin' tae ye, Boudica," Merida said as the dragon picked herself up and gave herself a shake. Walking over, she pet the dragon on her head, prompting Boudica to chirp happily at Merida.

"Ye up fer a ride?" Merida questioned, to which Boudica nodded her large head excitedly, "Alright then, let's get ye saddled up."

Merida and Hiccup took a few minutes retrieving the two large saddles, both specifically designed for their respective dragons. After getting both dragons saddled up, Hiccup and Merida pulled themselves on to the creatures' backs and hooked their harnesses to the saddles. Placing his feet into the stirrups, Hiccup tested the lever built into one of them which worked Toothless' prosthetic fin, opening and closing it at his command.

"Alright, everything looks all set," Hiccup stated before turning his attention to Merida, "How about you, Mer?"

"Ready whenever ye are, Hic!" Merida declared with a smile as Boudica pawed at the ground impatiently.

"Alright!" Hiccup declared excitedly as he gripped the saddle tightly, "Let's go!"

With that, Toothless leapt into the air, flapping his large wings to carry him and Hiccup into the sky, Boudica and Merida following closely behind. Varis cawed from the ground before flapping his wings rapidly and chasing after the two dragons.

Hiccup let out a whoop of joy as he soared through the air on Toothless' back, the wind wiping around him. Looking back, Hiccup heard Merida's excited laughter as she and Boudica chased after him. After reaching a high point in the air, Toothless and Boudica evened out, gliding far above the island. Varis cawed as he joined them, gliding between Toothless and Boudica.

"Whit now!?" Merida called over to Hiccup.

"Now?" Hiccup questioned as a smile spread across his face, "Now, we have some fun!"

With that, Hiccup unstrapped himself from Toothless' saddle before sliding off the side and falling through the empty air, prompting Toothless to fall along with him as his artificial fin closed up. Merida gasped in shock as she watched the two plummet to the ground as Hiccup let out another cry of joy. As the two fell, Hiccup and Toothless looked at one another, the Night Fury smiling at the young man, his tongue wagging comically in the wind. Reaching out, Toothless batted Hiccup with one of his paws, sending the Viking spinning through the air, laughing as he fell. Slowing his spin, Hiccup grabbed hold of Toothless before pulling himself back into the saddle. Latching himself in, Hiccup flared Toothless' wings, causing the Night Fury to pull up just before hitting the ground. With the wind whipping in their wake, the two went swooping over the village, kicking up flurries of snow as they passed over the rooftops.

As the two slowed down, Hiccup let out another whoop of joy as

Toothless began to glide over the bay.

"What do you think, pal?" Hiccup questioned as he patted Toothless on the side, "You think that impressed her?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, the sound of Merida's cry of excitement came rushing towards him. Turning, he saw Merida gripping Boudica's back as the two shot through the sky in a steep dive. They rocketed past Hiccup and Toothless, heading straight for a group of rocks that towered over the water just off of Berk's shores. Boudica's wings flared as they approached the rocks, slowing the Nadder to a more controllable speed. As they approached a pair of rocks that sat huddled together, Merida pulled Boudica to the side, prompting the Nadder to close her wings up again as go spinning between the rocks. Quickly opening her wings again, Merida and Boudica flew towards a natural bridge that connected two of the rocks. Unhooking herself from Boudica's saddle, Merida eased herself to her feet so she was standing unsteadily on the Nadder's back. Right before they reached the bridge, Merida leapt off of Boudica's back, prompting the Nadder to go swooping underneath the rock formation as the princess landed on top of it. The rock was slick with sea water and newly formed ice, causing Merida to slip and slide over the stone. She managed to keep her balance and when her momentum carried her to the other side of the bridge, she hopped off the edge and flipped forward before landing perfectly in Boudica's saddle as the Nadder came flying up from under the bridge.

"How's 'at!?" Merida called up to Hiccup as she latched herself back to Boudica's saddle, laughing with mirth.

"I guess that would be a no," Hiccup commented as he and Toothless looked on in surprise before the young man turned his attention back to the Night Fury, "What do you say, pal? Want to give it a try?"

Toothless grunted and nodded in reply, prompting Hiccup to laugh and pat the Night Fury on the head.

"Alright," Hiccup said as he gripped Toothless' saddle tight and took a calming breath, "Here goes nothing!"

With that, Toothless dove in the direction that Boudica had gone, folding his wings to increase his speed. The Night Fury easily spun between the two rocks before leveling out as he and Hiccup approached the rock bridge. Unhooking himself, Hiccup quickly pushed himself to his feet and stood unsteadily on Toothless' back. Just as they reached the bridge though, Toothless' artificial fin snapped shut, sending the Night Fury plummeting downwards just as Hiccup leapt off his back. The sudden shift caused Hiccup to go flipping through the air, sending him flying over the bridge as Toothless continued to fall with a startled roar.

As the two went falling through the air, the wind suddenly seemed to pick up around them in a swirl of snowflakes, changing the direction they were falling. Instead of falling into the icy sea, they landed on a lower rock that was covered in snow, hitting with a soft thump as loose flurries went flying in every direction.

Hiccup groaned as he pulled himself out of the pile of snow, shaking loose flakes off as he tried to steady his spinning head.

"Are ye okay!?" Merida called out in concern as Boudica landed on the rock and she slipped off the Nadder's back as Varis landed nearby. Pulling himself up, Hiccup glanced over at Toothless, who was pulling himself out of the snowbank, snorting flakes off of his nose.

"Yeah, I think we're okay," Hiccup replied with a smile, before he was nearly knocked back down as Merida pulled him into a hug.

"Daenae scare me like 'at!" Merida said, half angry, half relieved, "Ah thought ye were gaein' intae th' water fer sure!"

"Me too," Hiccup admitted, "The wind shifted though and pushed us over here. Lucky, I guess."

"Why's there sae much snow here?" Merida questioned as she looked over the small rock they stood on.

"What do you mean?" Hiccup asked in confusion.

"Look at all th' other rocks," Merida explained, gesturing to the other outcroppings that surrounded them, "They daenae hae nearly as much snow as this ane does."

"Weird," Hiccup agreed before shrugging his shoulders, "Anyway, I think we should be getting back to the village."

"Aye," Merida agreed, "'At's enough flyin' fer ane mornin'."

With that, the two climbed back onto their dragons and took off, flying back to the village, ignorant to the ethereal laughter that followed in their wake.

Later,

Hiccup sat in the smithy, the glow from the furnace warming and illuminating the shop, Toothless laying curled up on the ground behind him. He sat at his workbench, a sword laying in front of him next to his helmet. The sword was shorter than most, especially by Viking standards. It was made of finely polished steel that reflected the light back at Hiccup and the blade was curved and honed to an incredibly sharp edge. Old Norse runes were carved into the blade near the hilt. Hiccup stared at the blade pensively, lost in thought as he looked at his own reflection. He held his right hand in the air next to him, periodically clenching and unclenching his hand. His sleeve was rolled up to the elbow, revealing the spiraling red burn that ran the length of his arm. The burn resembled a pair of long, skinny dragons weaving around each other until they reached his hand where they faced each other on his palm, a fireball suspended between their open mouths.

Pausing, Hiccup shifted forward and reached out towards the sword with his burnt hand. He held his hand a few inches from the blade, hesitant to go further. Looking closer, Hiccup could see the space between his hand and the blade was starting to ripple like the air above a fire.

A knock from the door brought his attention back to reality.

"Doors open!" Hiccup announced as he pulled his hand away and rolled his sleeve back down, Toothless raising his head as he looked inquisitively at the door, "Come on in!"

The door opened and Merida stepped in with Varis on her shoulder and another young man in tow. The young man towered over the other two with broad shoulders and a heavy belly. He wore a heavy brown cloak over an equally heavy and brown fur coat and wool pants. Thick leather boots dripped with snow as he walked in and he rubbed his hands together for warmth, despite the fact that he already was wearing a pair of red wool gloves. A red wool scarf was wrapped around the bottom half of his round face and a small horned helmet sat on top of his head, his short, straw blonde hair sticking out from underneath.

"Oh, hey guys, what's up?" Hiccup questioned.

"It's getting' late," Merida explained, "Me an' Fishlegs came tae fetch ye fer supper."

"Wow, it's already that late?" Hiccup questioned, surprised, "I must have lost track of the time."

"Doing what?" the young man, Fishlegs, asked, "It's not like you've had a lot to do since Gobber left."

"Just trying to figure a few things out," Hiccup replied with a shrug as he picked the sword up off his workbench, absentmindedly clenching and unclenching his burnt hand.

"Still trying to figure out what Bemuhen is made out of, huh?" Fishlegs questioned, looking the blade over with his light blue eyes.

"It's not like any metal I've ever seen before," Hiccup explained as he looked at the sword again, "If I could just figure out what it is and how to get itâ€¦well, I could do some pretty cool stuff."

"Ah bet," Merida agreed with a chuckle, "Surely 'at's nae th' anly thin' ye've been workin' on."

"No," Hiccup agreed with a shake of his head, "I've been working on saddle designs for everyone and trying to upgrade my own. After what happened today, I was thinking of finding a way to lock Toothless' fin in place so I don't always have to be there for him to fly."

"That would be pretty handy," Fishlegs agreed.

"I've also been looking into some upgrades for my crossbow," Hiccup explained, laying his sword back down before turning to a nearby bench and picking the weapon in question, a finely crafted piece of machinery made of polished wood and metal.

"What are you trying to do with it?" Fishlegs questioned as he walked over to Hiccup's side.

"Trying a few things to make it easier to carry," Hiccup explained as he pulled down on the crossbeams of the weapon, causing them to click into place along the sides of the stock. Hitting a small button

caused the crossbeams to spring back into place with a snap.

"Nice," Fishlegs commented with an impressed nod.

"Thanks," Hiccup replied with a smirk as he set the crossbow down again, "I've also been working on a way to load arrows into it faster."

"Ye're lucky ye didnae get killed loadin' it last time," Merida pointed out as she leaned against one of the workbenches, melting snow dripping off the bottom of her boots as Varis hopped off her shoulder and began going through a few of the papers sitting on the bench.

"Exactly," Hiccup agreed with her, "It's not something I want to risk again."

"Whit are these?" Merida questioned as she turned her attention to the papers sitting on the workbench, shooing Varis out of the way.

"Just some ideas I've been playing with," Hiccup explained, walking over to Merida's side and indicating to one of the papers, "These are some sketches for an artificial leg better suited to dragon riding."

"What's this one?" Fishlegs questioned as he wandered over as well and indicated to the sketch of a hollow broadsword with an unusual looking pommel.

"I've been playing around with some ideas based off utilizing things we have now that we have dragons," Hiccup elaborated, "Ways to use dragon scales, Nightmare saliva, Zippleback gasâ€¦"

"Black rock?" Merida added.

"Black rock," Hiccup agreed with a nod of his head, "This is one of those ideas. The blade folds into the pommel and can be extended out, like the crossbow. There will be a store of Nightmare saliva in the pommel that coats the blade as it extends."

"Why wud ye want tae dae 'at?" Merida questioned in confusion.

"Because then the blade can be ignited," Fishlegs elaborated, nodding his head in understanding, "How will you ignite the saliva though?"

"I've been studying the Zipplebacks and I think I've figured out a way to mimic what the igniter head can do," Hiccup elaborated, "I was going to see if I can't build my own igniter into the sword so you can set off a spark and ignite the saliva whenever you need to. I might even be able to store some Zippleback gas in the pommel for the wielder to utilize."

"'At sounds amazin', Hic!" Merida exclaimed, clearly impressed.

"I've never even heard of a weapon like this," Fishlegs commented as he looked over the sketches with wonder, "What are you going to call

this?"

"Probably something simple, like a dragonblade or something like that," Hiccup answered with a shrug.

"Ye designin' yerself a replacement sword, Hic?" Merida questioned with a smirk.

"No, I like Bemuhen just fine," Hiccup replied with a chuckle, "But I'm sure if we put a sword like this into the right hands, that person could do some serious damage."

"No kidding," Fishlegs agreed with a nod, "Just got to make sure they don't light themselves on fire."

"I might have a solution for that too," Hiccup stated before he pulled out another sheet which showed various designs for pieces of light armor.

"Whit is this?" Merida questioned.

"Dragonhide," Hiccup replied solemnly.

"Hiccup," Merida said, slightly aghast, "Ye daenae mean taeâ€|"

"No," Hiccup assured her, "Never. But dragons get old and die and as ghastly as it seems it might be useful to use what they leave behind."

"Maybe," Merida stated, though she didn't look fully convinced, "Whit wud ye use it fer?"

"Well, not only is dragonhide tough, it's also fireproof," Hiccup explained, "That could be handy for a dragonrider, especially because it should also be lighter than metal armor."

"Interesting, if a bit grim," Fishlegs agreed.

"It's all just ideas right now," Hiccup explained with a shrug.

"Well, Ah think Ah've had enough o' broodin' over yer inventions fer ane night," Merida stated as she took a step away from the workbench, "Ah'm starved an' Ah understand there's saeme sort o' feast gaein' on taenight in th' Great Hall."

"Oh right," Hiccup replied as he remembered what day it was, "Tonight's when Dad starts the annual Snoggletog celebrations."

Merida stared at him in confusion for a few quiet moments.

"Whit th' bloody Hel is Snoggletog?" Merida questioned.

"It's an annual Viking winter celebration that marks the end of the year," Fishlegs explained with a shrug, "It's all about togetherness, and happiness and giving and all that good stuff."

"Oh, Ah see," Merida replied in understanding, "It sounds a little

like Hogmanay."

It was now Hiccup and Fishlegs' turn to look confused.

"What's Hogmanay?" Hiccup asked as he moved to grab his coat and cloak from a peg on the wall.

"It's th' end o' th' year celebration in th' Highlands," Merida explained as she moved towards the door, Varis flapping back up onto her shoulder, "Ah'll hae tae share saeme o' th' traditions with ye lot. After all, Ah'm sure Ah'm gaein' tae be learnin' a lot about Snoggletog."

Merida paused for a moment.

"Why's it called Snoggletog anyway?" Merida asked, looking at Hiccup as he put his coat.

"Beat's me," Hiccup answered as he put on his cloak, "I always thought it was a pretty stupid name."

Merida laughed as she opened the door and led them all out into the snow, Hiccup pausing to grab his helmet before closing the door and locking the smithy behind him. The four of them quickly made their way across the village to where the mighty Great Hall stood, eager to get out of the cold wind that tugged at their cloaks and nipped at their noses.

As they arrived at the Great Hall, they found it already bustling with people. Lanterns were being hung from the rafters and columns, making the Hall look brighter than Merida had ever seen it. At the same time, colorful decorations were being set up and strands of garland were being hung between the columns. All around them, Vikings and dragons alike were at work, happily helping one another set up the decorations.

"Wow," Merida said in wonder as she looked around, "Ah didnae think it wud be this colorful."

"This is nothing," Hiccup stated, walking past her into the Hall, "Wait until you see the tree."

"Tree?" Merida asked as she followed behind, "Whit tree?"

Fishlegs chuckled as he watched them go before his attention was drawn to a dragon that wandered up to him and nudged him with its nose. The dragon was a squat, round creature with a thick neck and a bulbous nose. It had a cavernous mouth filled with sharp teeth and black-on-yellow eyes. Its scales were brownish in color and had four stubby legs and small wings that looked like they could not support the dragon's weight.

"Hey, Meatlug," Fishlegs greeted the dragon, patting it on its head, "You been helping Mom put up the decorations?"

"Among other people," a new voice spoke up, bringing Fishlegs' attention to a young woman his own age who was approaching him. She was a head shorter than Fishlegs with a lithe but athletic build. She had shoulder length blonde hair that she wore in an elaborate braid that hung down and sat on her shoulder while her bangs hung in front

of one of her cold blue eyes, most of it held back by the red leather headband she wore. She wore a red tunic that fit her form closely. Her shoulders were covered by iron pauldrons and a large food head that was held up by an iron ring. A fur skirt hung from her waist, with iron spikes and decorative skulls attached to it under which she wore a pair of navy blue leggings. She wore matching leather, fur-lined boots and bracers while a few wrappings covered her biceps.

"Oh, hey Astrid," Fishlegs greeted with a slightly nervous smile, "What's up?"

"Not much," Astrid shrugged as she pat Meatlug on the neck, "Just helping your parents set up some decorations."

She indicated over her shoulder to two people, a man and a woman. That man was thick and heavy set with dark brown hair while the woman was slim with blonde hair. The woman sat on the man's shoulders, trying to wrap a strand of garland around one of the columns. Seeing Fishlegs, she smiled and waved enthusiastically, which caused the man to lose his balance and almost drop her.

Fishlegs snorted at the sight before turning his attention back to Astrid.

"They look like they can use all the help they can get," Fishlegs observed.

"Exactly my thinking," Astrid replied before she reached down and took Fishlegs' hand before leading him through the crowd towards his parents. Fishlegs blushed before smiling slightly as he allowed the smaller girl to tow him along.

Later,

Soon enough, the assembled Vikings and dragons took a break from putting up their decorations in order to feast with one another. The sound of conversation, eating and dragons grunting at one another filled the hall, even to the back where a smaller table had been set up with on a raised dais. Stoick, Hiccup and Merida sat at the table, joined by three others. One was a bent old woman with long, braided grey hair and a helmet with long, tall horns on her head. An equally old and gnarled staff that was taller than she was sat next to her, leaning against the table. The second was a tall, muscular, gruff-looking man with dark hair and a short beard, dressed mostly in black, wearing a helmet with tall horns. The final person was a young man the same age as Hiccup and Merida, thick set and broad shouldered with black hair, blue eyes and a stubbly beard. He wore a black fur cloak over an equally black jacket and brown pants, his feet covered by brown, fur-lined, leather boots.

"And that's how I saved Hiccup and Fishlegs from the Terrible Terror when we were kids," the young man said to Merida, a cocky grin on his face.

"Right," Merida stated, cocking her eyebrow at the young man sitting next to her, "Ah think ye're full o' shite, Snotlout."

"Oh come on, Princess!" Snotlout whined, holding his hand out towards Hiccup, "Hiccup was there, he'll tell you I'm telling you the

truth!"

"Yeah, of course," Hiccup said sarcastically, "Snotlout totally didn't run screaming from the house after the Terror bit him on the ass."

Merida laughed as Snotlout groaned with embarrassment and ran a hand over his face.

"Betrayed by my own cousin," Snotlout sighed, "What kind of world is it where blood means nothing anymore?"

Snotlout paused before glancing back at Merida.

"You know, I still got the scar from where it bit me," Snotlout pointed out.

"'At's wonderful, Snot," Merida replied with false sincerity, "Ah'm sure saeme poor, desperate lass will love tae see it saemeday."

"Really?" Snotlout asked in surprise.

"Nae."

Hiccup snorted at Merida's curt reply. As he laughed, he looked out over the Great Hall, smiling as he looked out at all the happy members of the village. Families eating with one another. Friends sharing drinks. Children playing with the dragons that were becoming so welcomed in the village. The sight warmed his heart as much as the fires burning in the firepits warmed the hall.

Suddenly, the doors were pushed open and a cold chill swept through the hall. While the abrupt opening of the door caught most of the Vikings' attentions, the presence of a stranger was what kept it.

After pushing the doors closed again, the stranger turned towards the center of the hall, allowing the Vikings to see his features. He was a large man, standing just as tall as Stoick and was equally thick. He wore a thick, red coat that hung to his knees and was lined with black fur that also covered his shoulders, a black, leather sword belt holding it shut while a curved sword hung from each hip. He wore an odd hat made of the same black fur as well as a pair of thick, brown leather boots. His hair was snow white and a thick beard hung down to his chest. He smiled as he looked around the hall, his blue eyes seeming to twinkle in the firelight.

The man had not entered alone either. Joining him was a large reindeer, its antlers sprouting high above its head as it regarded the hall with dark eyes. The man chuckled as he continued to observe the hall, his attention seemingly focused entirely on the decorations the Vikings had set up, patting the reindeer on its brown colored side.

There was a moment of stunned silence before Stoick stood up from his seat, eyeing the stranger wearily.

"Excuse me," Stoick began to say, prompting the stranger to whirl around and look at him like he just realized the chieftain was

there.

"Oh, _privet_!" the man said with deep, raspy voice and an accent Hiccup had never heard before, "Hello! You are being Stoick ze Vast, da?"

"I am," Stoick replied, caught off guard by the man's friendly and forward nature, "Who might you be?"

"Of course, how rude of me," the man stated with a chuckle before bowing dramatically, "I am being Nicholas St. North, humble traveler."

"And zis," the man continued, straightening back up and patting the reindeer on the side, "Is my companion, Donner."

The reindeer snorted at the sound of his name.

"How did you get here?" Stoick questioned, growing more confused by the second.

"I traveled," Nicholas provided, "I am being traveler, remember?"

"Yes, but how did you get on our island?" Stoick pressed, "No boats have come in for days."

"I traveled," Nicholas replied as he looked around for help, "Zis is vord, correct?"

"Yes, yes, fine," Stoick sighed as he pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration, "Why are you here then?"

"I am looking for someone," Nicholas answered, "I was hoping you could help?"

"You need my help to find someone?" Stoick questioned.

"No, no, not you," Nicholas stated with a chuckle before his twinkling eyes fell on Hiccup, "But maybe you."

"Me?" Hiccup asked in confusion as he felt all eyes turn to him.

"_Da_," Nicholas stated, a broad smile crossing his features, "I am theenking I will be needing your help, Hiccup Dragonrider."

A/N: And we're back! I know I said I would wait until after I finished Seven Days in Corona to start this one but all your feedback got me so excited I just had to start it. I really liked the way this chapter turned out and I hope you guys like all my additions! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

2. North

Chapter 2: North

It didn't take long for Stoick to have the Great Hall emptied after

Nicholas had made his announcement to Hiccup. Currently, only seven people remained in the Hall. Stoick stood before Nicholas, flanked by Spitelout and a large, blonde woman dressed in armor. Gothi stood to the side with Hiccup and Merida, both of them watching Nicholas wearily. Nicholas, for his part seemed to be oblivious to the looks he was getting. Instead, he was focused on Toothless who was observing the reindeer, Donner who was looking back at the Night Fury impassively.

"You should be careful," Spitelout observed, "Looks like Toothless is eyeing your deer for dinner."

"No need for concern," Nicholas replied dismissively, "He ees only looking."

"I'm surprised your deer isn't scared," Hiccup stated.

"Donnor ees being too proud to be scared of anyzing," Nicholas replied with a laugh as he turned and smiled at Hiccup, "Even a Night Fury."

"Nicholas," Stoick began to speak, pausing as the man in question held up his hand.

"Please, be calling me North," he insisted with another smile, his attention turning to the decorations hanging from the rafters.

"Alright," Stoick agreed, looking wearily at the other man, "North. Do you mind if we ask you some questions?"

"Certainly!" North stated as he walked around the hall, looking at the decorations, "I am liking zese, vat are zey for?"

"It's for a holiday," Stoick replied, thrown off by North's question, "Snoggletog."

"Snoggletog?" North questioned, making a face as he looked back at Stoick, "Terrible name."

"Can we get back to the point at hand here?" Stoick asked, growing more annoyed by the second.

"Of course," North replied with a chuckle, turning his attention back to the decorations, "You wanted to be asking questions."

"Right," Stoick grumbled, glaring at North, "First, I wanted to know how you got on our island."

"I traveled," North stated with a shrug as he looked over his shoulder at Stoick, "Remember? Ve talk about zees before."

"Enough games!" Spitelout snapped, pointing a finger at North, "You know what we're asking you. Quit jerking us around."

"Alright, alright," North chuckled as he turned to face Stoick fully, holding his hands up in a sign of peace, "I vas only pulling on ze leg."

Walking up to Stoick, North motioned the chieftain closer, prompting

him to lean closer to the traveler.

"Can you keep secret?" North whispered conspiratorially.

Stoick nodded his head.

"Vell, between you and me," North stated, indicating to Donner with his eyes, "Ze reindeerâ€|can fly."

A blank look fell over Stoick's features as North smiled at him. The two looked at one another for a moment before Stoick's hands shot out and grabbed North by his jacket, yanking the traveler closer as the two of them stood up straight.

"Enough of your games!" Stoick bellowed in North's face, "You're going to tell me what you're doing on my island and what you want with my son or gods' help me, I'm going to-"

"Dad!" Hiccup shouted, giving Stoick pause as he turned to look at his son, "This isn't helping."

"He's the one spouting nonsense, not me!" Stoick said, pointing an accusatory finger in North's face, poking the other man's nose, causing him to go cross-eyed so he could look at it.

"I know," Hiccup agreed, "But I don't think we're going to get what we want from him by beating it out of him. Let me try talking to him."

"Fine," Stoick grumbled, letting go of North's coat and shoving the other man half a step back. North gave Stoick a distasteful look as he brushed himself off and straightened his coat before turning his attention to Hiccup as the young man approached him.

"Uh, hi," Hiccup greeted the taller man awkwardly.

"_Privet_," North replied with a nod, "Your father ees being a veryâ€|aggressive man."

"Yeah, I know," Hiccup replied with a chuckle before he cleared his throat and continued, "So, uh, you said you needed my help finding someone?"

"_Da_," North replied with a smile and another nod.

"Why me?" Hiccup asked, arching an eyebrow at North.

"Because you and I have heard ze same message," North answered as he leaned closer to Hiccup.

"Message?" Hiccup asked in confusion, "What message?"

Without warning, North reached down and grabbed Hiccup's right wrist before jerking it up. The other's jumped forward to stop him, but stopped as North eyed them all, holding up his other hand to show that he meant Hiccup no harm. Slowly, he reached over to Hiccup's arm with his other hand and pulled the sleeve down, revealing the burn on the young man's arm.

"One cannot be touched by fire vizout being burnt, Hiccup

Dragonrider," North stated as he looked Hiccup right in the eye.

"Loki," Hiccup whispered in understanding, "Loki's talked to you?"

"I talk to ze flames," North said with a shrug as he let go of Hiccup's wrist and stood up straight again, "Sometime zey talk back."

"If Loki sent you that means the person who you're looking forâ€¦" Hiccup paused as he looked North in the eye, "You're looking for the spirit. The one he told me about. The young god."

"_Da,_" North confirmed.

"How can I help you?" Hiccup questioned uncertainly, "I don't know anything about spirits and gods."

"You are knowing more zan most," North reassured him, "But I am not needing you for vhat you know, I am needing you for vhat you are."

"And what's that exactly?" Hiccup pressed.

"A good man," North answered with a smile only adding to Hiccup's confusion.

"Okay, so you need me," Hiccup stated with a helpless shrug, "Where would we even look? Plus, it's the middle of winter, not the best time to be traveling."

"He's nae gaein' anywhere withoot me," Merida spoke up defiantly as she walked up next to Hiccup and took his hand, looking up at North and daring him to challenge her, Varis cawing loudly from her shoulder.

"Relax, _Printsessa_," North assured her, "Ve are not going anywhere."

"We're not?" Hiccup asked in confusion.

"_Net_," North replied before pointing at the ground, "Because he ees being here on Berk."

"Are you telling me there isâ€¦a godâ€¦here on Berk?" Stoick asked, a look of shock on his face.

"_Da,_" North affirmed with another nod.

"How do you know?" Gothi questioned, speaking up for the first time.

"Because I am knowing him," North explained as he looked over at Gothi.

"Ye know him?" Merida asked incredulously, "Ye _know_ him?"

"_Da_, of course!" North answered with another laugh, "I have been knowing heem hees whole life!"

"His whole life?" Hiccup asked, surprised.

"_Da_, he ees not being very old," North explained, "Only twenty, twenty one years."

"Whit's he like?" Merida questioned, tilting her head inquisitively, Varis mirroring the motion from his perch on her shoulder, "Whit kind o' spirit is he?"

"He ees ze wind and he's ees ze cold," North stated, "He ees joyâ€|and he ees loneliness."

North looked around at the others, who he held in rapt attention, before chuckling.

"Mostly, I just call heem Jack," North stated with a smile.

"Jack?" Spitelout questioned, crooking an eyebrow at North.

"Jack Frost," North replied with a shrug, "It is being ze name he prefers."

"What is he doing here?" Gothi asked.

"I am not knowing," North answered with a shrug.

"You don't know?" Stoick questioned in confusion, "I thought you've been traveling with him for twenty years."

"I have been knowing him for twenty years," North corrected, "I do not always travel with heem. He is ze wind. He comes and he goes. It is being hees way."

"So, do you have any idea about why he's here?" Hiccup asked.

"I am believing he ees looking for someone," North answered.

"So, we're trying to find someoneâ€|who's trying to find someone?" Spitelout questioned, an incredulous look on his face.

"_Da_, exactly," North agreed, pointing at Spitelout and nodding.

"Who is he lookin' fer?" Merida asked.

"I am not knowing," North answered with a helpless shrug, "Ve veell be needing to ask heem when we find heem."

Merida and Hiccup shared a dissatisfied look as Varis ruffled his feathers.

"That's not a lot to go on, uh, North," Hiccup pointed out.

"_Da_," North agreed, scratching the back of his neck as he offered Hiccup an apologetic smile, "But I am knowing zat if ve vork together, ve veell find him. Is small island, after all. Not many places where he could be hiding."

"Ye'd be surprised," Merida commented knowingly as Varis cawed in

agreement on her shoulder.

As Merida and Hiccup talked with North, Stoick motioned for his lieutenants and Gothi to come speak with him.

"What are we going to do with this man, Stoick?" the woman questioned, crossing her arms as she glanced back at North.

"I have to admit, spirits and gods are not my forte, Bertha," Stoick admitted before turning his attention to Gothi, "What do you think, Elder?"

"He speaks with a certain authority," Gothi admitted, turning her gaze towards North and gave him an appraising look, "And he has a feel of the spirit world around him. A stronger one than I've ever come across."

"What do you mean by a 'feel'?" Spitelout questioned with another raised eyebrow.

"It is hard to explain," Gothi said as she waved her hand through the air, "The best way I can explain it is that if you know what to look for, you can tell who has a touch of the spirits in them and who does not."

"So, you think this man was sent by Loki?" Stoick questioned.

"I do," Gothi replied with a nod.

"Do you think this has to do with the spirits and shadows Hiccup's been talking about since he woke?" Bertha questioned.

"It would seem so," Stoick answered as Gothi nodded.

"Even if all this talk of gods and spirits is real," Spitelout stated, a doubtful look on his face, "Are we going to trust the word of Loki, the God of Lies?"

"Loki is something much greater than a simple liar," Gothi argued, glaring up at Spitelout, "You would do well to remember that, Spitelout Jorgeson."

"Liar or not, Loki is very much real," Stoick stated, trying to diffuse the rising tension, "He has marked my son for some reason, and if this man's arrival is part of that purpose, then I want to see where it leads."

"So, we're going to let him stay here?" Bertha questioned.

"Yes," Stoick confirmed, "I'd rather keep him close so that I can better keep an eye on him. I might believe this North character, but that doesn't mean I trust him."

The other's agreed with nods prompting Stoick to turn his attention back towards North.

"North," Stoick spoke up, grabbing the other man's attention, "The hour grows late and it seems as though you will be staying with us for a time. I hope one of our guest houses will suffice for your stay."

"_Da_," North agreed with a smile and a nod, "I am sure zat it veell suit me well."

"If you'd like, I can show you to them now," Stoick offered, before he paused as Hiccup stepped forward.

"Actually Dad, me and Merida would like to bring him over," Hiccup said, looking slightly nervous as he spoke, "If you don't mind."

"Go right ahead, son," Stoick stated after a moment with a smirk and a nod, "I'll see you and Merida back at the house."

"Thanks, Dad," Hiccup replied with a small smile of his own, before turning his attention back to North and Merida, the later of who was already throwing on her cloak.

"Here," Merida said as she handed Hiccup his cloak, "Daenae want this Jack fellow tae freeze ye solid afore ye've had a chance tae introduce yerself."

"No need to be worrying about zat," North said with a laugh before pausing, "He only deed zat once."

Hiccup and Merida shared a worried look as North turned away from the two of them and began making his way toward the door, signaling Donner to follow him as he did. The deer trotted over to North as Hiccup and Merida followed suit, Toothless falling in step with them. As they reached the door, North pushed it open, pausing as a blast of cold wind struck him in the face before he gestured to the others to step outside, Hiccup grabbing a torch from a nearby scone on the wall before exiting the Hall.

As the small group made their way towards the edge of the village where one of the small guest houses was located, Hiccup glanced at North, wanting to ask something but unable to find the right way to.

"I see you are vantage to ask me a question, Hiccup Dragonrider," North observed, a knowing smile on his face as Hiccup whipped his head around to look up at the taller man, "Vhat ees eet you are vantage to know?"

"I guess the one question I wanted to ask you is where are you from?" Hiccup asked as they trudged through the snow, "I've never heard someone speak with an accent like yours before."

"Understandable," North said with another laugh, "My people do not enjoy traveling from zeir home. I am a Rus of ze Frozen Steppes far to ze east of ze Norselands."

"Ah've heard o' th' Rus afore," Merida observed, giving North a quizzical look, "Ye daenae exactly act like Ah imagined a Rus wud act like."

"I suspect not," North replied with an even louder laugh that the howling wind carried over the village, "I am not being as grim and dower as people like to zeenk ze Rus are, zough I weell admit zat some of my countrymen fit zat description perfectly."

"Why did you leave the Frozen Steppes?" Hiccup questioned as they approached the guest house.

"Trust me, if you ever go to ze Steppes, you veell vant to be leaving too," North said in a way that sounded like he wasn't joking at all.

"Seriously though, why did you leave?" Hiccup pressed as he opened the door and moving out of the way to allow North, Toothless and Merida to enter. He paused for a moment to allow Donner inside as well, but the reindeer merely snorted at him before wandering off around the house, apparently oblivious to the cold. Hiccup quirked an eyebrow as he watched Donner leave before shrugging and entering the house, closing the door behind him.

"I followed my calling," North replied to Hiccup's question with a shrug as he took off his hat and set it on a nearby table. Hiccup walked over to the fireplace, grabbed a log that was sitting nearby in before throwing the torch in as well to light them. The lower level of the house was sparsely furnished, with only a single chair near the fireplace along with another by kitchen table. A set of stairs sat near the back of the room, leading to the second floor.

"Yer calling?" Merida pressed as she pulled her hood back and took off her hat, shaking her curly red hair out. As Merida shook her head, Varis let out a caw and flew over to the mantle of the fireplace, ruffling his feathers as he settled onto his new perch.

"I have always had a certainâ€|sense for zings," North answered, turning to study Merida as he undid his swordbelt, stepping out of the way of Toothless as the dragon sniffed around the room.

"Whit sort o' sense?" Merida asked further.

"I zeenk you know vhat sense I am talking about," North answered with a chuckle as he set the swordbelt to the side as well.

"Whit dae ye mean by 'at?" Merida questioned, looking up at North in confusion.

"Maybe you are not knowing as much as I zought," North observed as he began to pull his coat off, revealing the simple white shirt he wore underneath, "Tell me, _Printessa_, have you ever felt somezing. Somezing you could not explain, but it told you somezing you could not have known otherwise?"

Merida looked up at him for a few quite moments with a surprised and pensive look on her face before she slowly nodded.

"You are feeling it right now, are you not?" North questioned, grinning as he leaned in closer to Merida. Merida nodded again as Varis let out a caw from his perch.

"Vhat do you feel?" North asked, standing back up as he began to shrug his coat off.

"Ah feelâ€|saemethin' in ye," Merida replied, struggling to find the words to describe what she was feeling, "Saemethin'

wondrousâ€|"

North took his jacket off as Merida continued talking, revealing numerous black tattoos covering both his arms.

"..And dangerous," Merida finish, looking at North's tattoos with wide eyes as the Rus chuckled, throwing his coat onto a nearby chair.

"Whoa," Hiccup said in amazement as he looked at North's tattoos as well. North looked at Hiccup in confusion for a moment before he realized what the young man was looking at and chuckled again.

"I am always forgetting how uncommon zeengs such as zis are outside ze Steppes," North commented as he looked at the tattoos as well.

"Can we see them?" Merida questioned as she took a hesitant step towards North.

"_Da,_ of course," North answered as he stepped closer to the fire where there was more light and held his arms out for them to see.

Walking up, Merida and Hiccup looked closely at the tattoos that covered North's arms. The entirety of his skin was covered in ink, though the tattoos were segmented into small squares surrounding a single rectangle on each forearm. Each of the smaller squares contained various pictures, depicting things from swords, to snowflakes, to horses, to ships, to compasses pointing north. Each of the rectangles contained a single word, though they were written with symbols that neither Hiccup nor Merida could read.

"What do these say?" Hiccup asked, indicating toward the words, "I've never seen writing like this before."

"Eet ees ze writing of my people," North explained before holding up his right arm, "Zis one says "_neposlushnyy_" or "naughty" to you. Ze other ees_ "khoroshiy"_ or "nice"."

"Why dae ye hae th' words naughty an' nice marked on yer arms?" Merida questioned, quirking an eyebrow at North.

"To remind me which sword goes in which hand, of course!" North replied with a laugh.

"Come again?" Hiccup questioned in confusion.

"Here, let me be showing you," North stated as he walked over to where his sword belt lay and picked it up. He quickly drew the two swords, holding one in each hand before walking back to Hiccup and Merida. Hiccup quickly noticed the two swords were sabers, both slightly longer than his own. One sword was made of finely polished metal, its keen edge gleaming in the fire. The sword was so polished it had a mirror finish, just like Bemuhens, catching Hiccup's attention immediately. The other sword was much uglier in comparison. The blade was made out of dull grey metal, and here and there Hiccup could see dots of rust and what could only be dried blood. Instead of a single keen edge, the blade was serrated, making it look like North was holding some sort of metal jawbone than a true sword.

"Zis ees Naughty," North explained, holding the serrated blade up for Hiccup and Merida to see before holding up the other one, "And zis ees Nice."

"Wow," Merida stated as she looked at the swords, "These look like they've seen some use."

"More zan you know," North replied ominously.

"Okay, seriously now, what the Hel are you?" Hiccup snapped, his frustration evident as he looked up at North.

"Vhat do you mean?" North questioned in confusion.

"You show up out of nowhere, saying you flew in on a reindeer of all things, saying you're looking for a spirit because another spirit told you too, you apparently have some weird spirit sense that you share with my girlfriend, and now you have a sword that's made out of the same weird metal as mine!" Hiccup ranted, as he pointed a finger at North, "So, I ask again, what the Hel are you!?"

"You have sword like mine?" North questioned innocently.

"Don't change the subject!" Hiccup shouted in aggravation.

"Sorry," North apologized, holding his hands up in an effort to calm Hiccup down, "Eet ees hard to explain, but I veell do my best."

Placing his swords back on the table, North turned to address Hiccup and Merida and took a deep breath.

"I am being vhat you might call a magi," North stated.

"A magi?" Hiccup questioned in confusion, "What's a magi?"

"A wise man," Merida provided, "Like a shaman or a druid or a prophet."

"Or a witch," Hiccup picked up.

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod of his head.

"So, what does that mean?" Hiccup pressed.

"It means he can speak with spirits, like he said," Merida answered.

"Eet ees being a leettle more zan zat," North interjected, "Not only do I hear ze spirits, but I listen to vhat zey say. You are knowing zat ze great spirits can have only little effect on ze world, _da_?"

Hiccup and Merida nodded in unison.

"Vell, because of zat, they are needing to vork through mortals," North explained, "Mortals like me."

"That's why you've been traveling with Jack Frost," Hiccup surmised,

a look of understanding on his face, "That's why Loki sent you here."

North nodded his head in affirmation.

"Are there many magi?" Merida questioned.

"_Net_, I am not believing so," North answered, shaking his head, "It is rare gift and rarer steell to have someone to train you. I have only ever known a few people like me, one being ze man who taught me, a man by the name of Ombric Shalazar."

"Where is he?" Hiccup asked.

"He is dead," North answered simply.

"Oh...I-I'm sorry," Hiccup apologized softly.

"It is alright," North replied with a shrug, "It vas long time ago."

"So, if you're working with Loki, that means you're working against the shadow that he mentioned, right?" Hiccup questioned.

"_Da_," North affirmed with a grim nod.

"Can you tell me about him?" Hiccup asked, "Not even Gothi seemed to know a lot about him. She's only heard old legend of a great darkness that covered the world in the time before time."

"Eet ees long story," North warned, "And eet ees not a happy one."

"If we're supposed tae dae saemethin' aboot this guy, we hae tae know about him," Merida insisted.

"Very well," North said with a sigh as he settled into a wooden chair near the fire, the furniture piece creaking under his bulk, "I suggest you get settled zen."

Hiccup and Merida glanced at one another before they took off their coats, gloves and cloaks before setting them aside. They sat down next to each other on the floor before North, leaning against Toothless as he curled behind them. For a few moments, North said nothing as he stared into fire, his hands clasped and resting on his stomach. Varis shifted on his perch above the fireplace and cawed, snapping North back to reality.

"Have you ever heard of ze Boogeyman?" North questioned, his voice low.

"Yes," Hiccup and Merida said together before looking at each other in surprise, causing North to chuckle.

"Tell me vhat you know about ze Boogeyman," North prompted.

"He's a story," Merida said hesitantly, glancing at Hiccup uncertainly, "Told tae scare little kids."

"If you stay up too late," Hiccup continued, a confused look on his

face, "Or if you disobey your parentsâ€¦"

"He'll come an' take ye," Merida finished, an equally puzzled look on her face.

"Did you ever believe eet?" North pressed.

"When Ah was a wee lass, Ah was scared he was hidin' under ma bed," Merida stated, a pensive look on her face, "Ah thought 'at if Ah ever got oot o' bed in th' middle o' th' night he'd grab ma legs an' pull me into the shadows."

"When I was a kid, I thought he lived in the woods behind my house," Hiccup said after Merida was done, "Sometimes I thought I could see him moving amongst the trees and I swear I could hear him scratching at the walls of my room at night."

Hiccup and Merida looked at each other again as they pondered each other's stories.

"I am seeing eet working in your minds," North commented, leaning forward in his chair, "How ees eet zat, despite being raised in two different cultures, you vere taught such a markedly similar story? And I promise you zat eet ees not just ze Norselands and ze Highlands zat share zis tale. Go to Corona, Arendelle, Duloc, ze Steppes, ze Moorishlands, ze Southern Isles, and anywhere beyond or in between, ze tale vill be ze same."

"Sae, this shadow we've been warned aboutâ€¦it's the Boogeyman?" Merida questioned as she raised her eyebrow.

"Zat and so much more," North answered as he leaned back into his chair, "He ees ze dark and fear zat lurks in ze hearts of all men and women. He ees ze nightmare zat haunts our dreams and the anxiety zat weighs down our days. He is ze reason children are taught to fear ze night."

"Why?" Hiccup questioned as the flames in the fireplace cast dancing shadows on the walls. North paused as he looked Hiccup dead in the eye, his blue eyes having lost their previous twinkle.

"Because ze night ees dark and full of terrors."

A/N: So, lots of exposition in this one, tried to spice it up, hope you guys enjoyed it all the same because I really enjoy world building. Also, North is a lot of fun to write. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

3. Shadow Play

****Chapter 3: Shadow Play****

"Are you knowing vat ze vorld vas like in ze time before time, Hiccup Dragonrider?" North questioned, the fire painting shadows across half his face.

"I can't say that I do," Hiccup replied, "I get the feeling you're going to tell me though."

"Smart boy," North observed with a grin, "In ze time before time, ven ze vorld vas still young, it vas being a much wilder place."

"Whit dae ye mean by "wilder"?" Merida questioned.

"In zat ancient time, spirits great and small vandered ze vorld," North explained, "Men had not built zeir great cities, ogres, elves and trolls lived in vast numbers and giants still walked ze earth. Zis vas ze vorld zat ze great spirits ruled."

"How many great spirits are there?" Hiccup asked.

"Ten at ze time," North answered, "Eleven now, counting Jack. Vater and stone vere ze first, ancient and unknowable, zey have never been ones to take part in ze varring of ze ozer spirits."

"They daenae care?" Merida asked in surprise, "How can they nae care?"

"Does ze ocean rejoice vhen ze sun rises?" North questioned rhetorically, "Does ze mountain despair ven ze night falls? Ze seas and ze earth know both ze sun and ze shadow and care little for ze difference."

Merida frowned at that and crossed her arms but said nothing in argument.

"Who are the others?" Hiccup pressed.

"Ze remaining eight are ones you are being more familiar vith," North answered as he turned his gaze towards the fire again, "You have already met ze spirit of fire."

"Loki," Hiccup agreed with a nod, "Though he goes by other names as well."

"As do zey all," North stated, "In truth, ze spirits did not name zemselves, zey care little for such distinctions. Zey have merely adopted ze monikers zat ve have given zem."

"He also told me about Thor," Hiccup said, "I'm guessing he's the spirit of lightning."

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod, "He is being ze spirit of courage and ze storm."

"Soliel is ane too, Ah imagine," Merida added.

"_Da,_," North said again with another nod, "Ze spirit of light and wisdom."

"That's three," Hiccup commented, "Who are the others?"

"Ze four others are all being allies of ze spirit of light along vith ze spirits of fire and thunder," North explained, "First and foremost is ze spirit of ze moon and love."

"Lady Lune," Merida commented with surprise, "Ah didnae realize she was a separate spirit. Is she really Soliel's wife?"

"Vife is being vrong vord," North replied with a chuckle and a wave of his hand.

"Spirits don't care much for marriage, I imagine," Hiccup observed with a chuckle.

"Zis is being true," North agreed with another chuckle, "But I vas talking about ze other part of being a wife."

"Other part?" Merida questioned in confusion, arching an eyebrow.

"Spirits are caring as little for sex and gender as zey are for names," North answered, "I've been to places where ze moon is ze man and ze sun is ze voman."

North smiled broadly as he leaned in closer.

"I have even been places where both are men or both are vomen," North explained, "Ze relationship does not change."

North chuckled as he leaned back while Hiccup and Merida looked back at him, eyes wide with understanding.

"Um, who are the other spirits?" Hiccup questioned awkwardly.

"The three other spirits are those of dreams, life, and death," North said ominously.

"Death?" Merida questioned in surprise, "Sounds like someane who wud be on th' shadow's side."

"Being spoken like someone who is knowing so little of ze vorld," North replied with a smirk, as Merida frowned at him, "You are seeing death as an end, vhen really it is a part of an ever spinning cycle of life, death and rebirth."

"But death is an end," Hiccup observed, a pensive look on his face, "For that person at least."

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod of his head, "Ze individual can be lost in ze great cycle of life, which is vhy ze spirit of death is also ze spirit of memory. She and her agents vatch over us from ze moment of our births, recording everyzing ve do vith our lives so zat ve vill be remembered on our deaths. And vhen zat time comes, it is she who spirits us to our final rest."

"She?" Merida asked in surprise.

"Ze spirit of death seems to be preferring ze form of a woman, though zere are being plenty of places zat know her as a man," North mused, stroking his beard thoughtfully, "Not here though, if I am remembering correct."

"Yes," Hiccup replied, "The goddess Hel. She's not looked favorably on here."

"Sae, all th' various gods an' goddesses o' death are her?" Merida questioned.

"Among others," North answered with a shrug.

"Like whot?" Merida asked.

"Have you ever been hearing of ze Tooth Fairy?" North questioned as he leaned in closer, grinning at Merida as he did.

"â€|Ye must be jokin'," Merida replied flatly as Hiccup crooked an eyebrow in confusion.

"I no joke," North replied with a chuckle as he sat back in his seat again.

"Whit daes collectin' teeth hae tae dae with death?" Merida questioned.

"Vhat does it not?" North retorted, "Losing your teeth is a sign of growing older. Vether it means changing from child to adult or turning from adult toâ€|"

"Ah get th' idea," Merida answered, rubbing her arm.

"Okay, what the Hel is a Tooth Fairy?" Hiccup asked in confusion.

"It's a story 'at parents tell their children aboot whit happens tae yer baby teeth after they fall oot," Merida explained, "They say 'at if ye put them under yer pillow at night, th' Tooth Fairy will come an' take it an' leave ye a coin."

"â€|What does she do with the teeth?" Hiccup questioned after a moment.

"'At part tended tae be left oot," Merida observed before turning her attention to North, "Whit daes th' spirit o' death an' memory dae with baby teeth?"

"Your teeth are containing a record of your memory," North explained, "By collecting zem, she can keep a better record of our lives."

"This is crazy," Hiccup said with a shake of his head, "What about the other ones you mentioned? The spirits of life and dreams."

"_Da,_ one is ze spirit of life," North explained, "He works in tandem vith ze spirit of death. He represents all things about life, from plants to animals to people. He also represents vhat life means to people."

"What is that?" Hiccup asked.

"Hope," North answered with a smile, "Life represents hope for the future, vether it being ze return of spring or ze birth of a baby."

"An' whit o' th' spirit o' dreams?" Merida asked.

"One of ze oldest and most mysterious," North explained, "He has been around since man first looked up at ze stars and vondered vat zey

vere. He is imagination incarnate and ze one who has ze easiest time reaching zrough ze spirit world."

"You're talking about the Great Collective Unconscious, right?" Hiccup questioned, "Loki told me about that."

"Some call it zat," North agreed with a nod, "Others ze Astral Plane, while others still call it ze Dreamlands or ze Dreaming."

"Sae, those are th' spirits 'at are on our side," Merida observed.

"And then there's the Boogeyman," Hiccup stated grimly, "Does he have other names?"

"I have heard a few," North answered with a slow nod, "Set. Chernobog. Pitch Black."

"Pitch Black?" Merida questioned.

"Comes from old story," North explained solemnly, "Man and voman live in cottage deep in woods with zeir child. One night, child begins screaming. Father comes and ask vhat is wrong. Child points out vindow and says "Pitch Black! Pitch Black!" Father zinks child is scared of dark, laughs and tells child to go to bed. Next day, father comes in to room and find child gone, vindow broken and note left behind. Note reads "Do not fear ze dark, fear vhat it hides. Sincerely, Pitch Black.""

Merida and Hiccup sat in silence as they thought over the story that North had just told them.

"Why did he take th' child?" Merida questioned quietly.

"To corrupt him," North explained darkly, "To change him."

"Intae whit?" Merida questioned, dreading the answer.

"A boggart," North answered grimly, "A creature of fear and shadow just like him."

"He can do that?" Hiccup asked, aghast.

"Zat and so much more," North elaborated as he turned to look into the flames again, the flickering light casting dancing shadows on the walls, "Boggarts are vhat he creates when he is having time to mold his creation. He also is having quicker forms of corruption, creating all sorts of horrors. From humans, he creates living shadows known as shades. From wolves, terrible hounds known as barghests and from birds, his dreaded valravns. From elves he makes gremlins, and from trolls he makes goblins. Even ogres become someting vorse under his touch, flesh-eating monsters known as stallos. Ze vorst though are ze few boggarts zat reach adulthood, trained in ze arts of war and terror. Zey are known as his blackguards, mockeries of knighthood astride corrupted horses known as nightmares."

"Gods," Hiccup whispered as Merida covered her mouth in shock, "He can do all that?"

"That, and more," North repeated grimly, "He is being one of ze most

powerful of ze spirits and by far ze most dangerous."

"Whit happened, North?" Merida questioned, "Whit happened in th' time afore time? Whit caused all th' spirits tae leave th' world?"

"Back zen, there were being only eight great spirits," North explained, "Ze spirits of fire and lightning had not yet come into being and dragons had not yet been born into ze vorld. Still, the world held things that you and I have never seen. Spirits great and small. Elves, trolls and ogres in vast numbers. Giants, now long dead, still vandered ze land, shaking ze earth vith their very footsteps."

As North talked, Merida glanced at a nearby wall and could have sworn the shadows cast upon the wall were moving and changing along with North's story, depicting massive, humanoid creatures lumbering across the countryside.

"It vas in zis vorld zat ze great spirits freely interacted vih all forms of life," North went on, "Ze spirits of ze sun and moon sought to promote harmony amongst ze races and spread enlightenment across the world. Ze spirit of shadow, however, vanted somezing entirely different."

As the story continued, the shadows on the wall shifted to the image of a tall, gaunt man looming over a group of people.

"Ze spirit of shadow vas being one of ze oldest spirits," North explained, "He had hung over the rock and wave long before ze first star twinkled in ze night sky. Now, ze burning sun drove him into hiding for half ze day, every day, while ze moon and ze stars kept him at bay at night. He craved nothing more zan ze return of his reign of darkness, ven vat few creatures valked ze earth and swam ze seas truly knew fear."

The shadows switched to the image of the shadow man making threatening motions towards the people, who cowered before him.

"So, for years upon years, he vorked," North explained, "Stealing children from zeir cribs to turn into his boggarts. Capturing and corrupting anyzing he found vandering alone in ze dark places of ze world. Eventually, he had an army of tens of thousands. He unleashed it upon ze vorld in a surge of fear and shadow. Even daylight vas not enough to keep ze people of ze vorld safe from ze army of living shadows. His attack was so swift and so powerful that even ze ozer great spirits vere caught off guard and much of ze vorld quickly fell to shadow."

The shadows of people suddenly shifted to those of grotesque monsters, with the shadow man ordering forward. The image shifted to the shadow creatures attacking other people, who all ran away in fear.

"Ze five great spirits moved against him, but ze shadow's power vas too great," North went on, "Ze spirits of life, death and dreams quickly fell first. Ze spirit of ze sun did great battle vith ze shadow, but ultimately even he fell and ze world became endless night, with only ze moon and ze stars to vatch over ze vorld. Men, elves, ogres, trolls and giants alike cowered in fear of ze shadows wrath and all seemed lost."

The shadows showed the man growing larger and large snarling down at the tiny people below him.

"But ze shadow's victory vas not complete," North explained, "For ze spirit of ze moon continued to elude him. Ze spirit had found a corner of ze world that even ze shadow did not know and zere she kept ze two zings zat could defeat him hidden away."

"What were they?" Hiccup questioned, oblivious to the shadows on the wall changing to the image of a cowering woman clutching something to her chest.

"Her sons," North explained, as the shadow of the woman revealed she was holding two babies in her arms, "Ze spirits of fire and lightning, ze children she had had with ze spirit of ze sun. She raised zem in secret, spending zose years of ze long night teaching zem to use their powers and trying to figure out a way to defeat ze shadow. Ultimately, it vas being ze spirit of fire who realized vat zey had to do."

"They had to seal the shadow away from the world," Hiccup supplied as the shadows on the wall changed to the image of two men standing next to one another, one tall and slim, the other broad and muscular.

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod, "But in order to be doing zat, zey had to be confronting ze shadow and his minions face to face. So, ze spirits of fire and lightning began secretly making zeir way around ze world, recruiting ze people for an army ze likes of which ze world had never been seeing before. Ze spirit of lightning taught zem vhat it vas to be having courage in ze face of danger. He taught zem how to be brave and how to fight."

The shadows shifted to the muscular man standing in front of a group of smaller people, running through fighting drills with them.

"Ze spirit of fire, on ze other hand, gave zem ze power of knowledge," North went on, "He taught zem how to create and harness fire. He showed zem how forge and craft veapons and armor. After years of vork, ze spirits finally created an army of men, elves, trolls, ogres and giants armed with the bronze veapons and armor of old."

The shadows shifted to the image of an army of all shapes and sizes, dressed in ancient looking armor and armed with spears, shields and swords.

"Even zat, ze spirits feared, vould not be enough," North continued, "So, ze spirit of fire decided zey needed a new veapon to be bringing to ze field. So, he created the living embodiment of fire."

"Dragons," Hiccup muttered, still failing to notice the shifting shadows on the wall behind him. As Merida looked on, the shadows shifted to the form of a massive dragon, a silhouette that she was all too familiar with, bulky in body and legs with a large, square-shaped head, clubbed tail and huge wings.

"_Da_," North confirmed with a nod, "Two at first, dozens afterwards."

Powerful beasts to bolster zeir army against ze forces of ze shadow."

"Two?" Hiccup questioned in confusion, "What two dragons did Loki make first?"

"You are already being familiar with one of them," North explained before turning his gaze towards Merida, who was still looking at the shadows on the wall, "In fact, one of you killed it."

"Th' Red Death," Merida muttered, her attention still focused upon the shadows on the wall.

"_Da_," North stated with a nod, narrowing his eyes as he looked over at Merida, "Ze Red Death and its twin."

"The Red Death has a twin!?" Hiccup questioned in shock as Toothless perked up, his eyes wide.

"_Da_," North repeated with a nod, his attention still focused on Merida, "Ze spirit of fire vas seeing fit to create two opposites, just like him and his brother. So, he created a great dragon of fire and a great dragon of cold."

"Cold?" Hiccup questioned in confusion, "How could Loki make a dragon of cold?"

"What is cold, but ze absence of heat?" North asked rhetorically, glancing over at Hiccup and shrugging. As Hiccup and North talked, the shadows shifted again, with a second, equally large dragon appearing next to the Red Death's silhouette. This one, while as large and bulky as the Red Death, though instead of wings, this dragon had long fins coming from its back, as well as a forest of quill like spikes. Two massive tusks extended from the dragon's mouth, hanging down to just above its feet.

"What was it called?" Hiccup questioned.

"Some took to calling it ze Bewilderbeast," North explained, "Others are referring to it as ze White Death."

"I'm sensing a pattern here," Hiccup observed, dryly.

"As you should," North stated, "Either vay, together, ze two dragons had ze power to control any other dragon. Vith zem, ze spirits led their armies against ze forces of ze shadow."

"What happened?" Hiccup questioned.

"Ze greatest battle ze vorld has ever been knowing," North answered simple, "Ze two armies clashed while ze spirits engaged ze shadow in ze skies above zem."

The shadows on the wall changed to show the two men battling the shadow, silhouettes of flames and lightning bolts striking the shadow as it clawed at the two men.

"While ze spirits of fire and lightning distracted ze shadow vith their battle above and below, ze spirit of ze moon wove a spell of her own," North went on, "Vhen ze shadow defeated ze other spirits,

he absorbed zem into his own dark form. Using her magic, the spirit of ze moon was able to be taking ze shadow unawares, reaching into him and pulling ze spirits out of his black form."

The shadows on the wall showed a woman appearing behind the shadow and driving her hands into its back. As the shadow writhed in pain, the woman began pulling on something before she managed to pull a man out of the shadow's back.

"Vith ze other spirits free and ze shadow weakened, zey vere able to be putting zeir plan into action," North continued, "Ze spirits knew zat the shadow vas too powerful to truly defeat. Zey had to seal him away from ze material world, but in order to do zat, zey all had to leave vith him. As ze shadow tried to recover, ze spirits used zeir power to open a portal to ze spirit world, which sucked zem all in and closed, leaving zem no way to return."

The shadows showed the shadow being surrounded by others before a swirl appeared below them and appeared to suck them in, the shadows shaking his hands in the air in anger as he was sucked in as well.

"What happened to the shadow's army?" Hiccup questioned.

"It dissipated as the shadow left ze world," North explained, "Ze various members of ze spirits' army went zeir separate ways, forming ze peoples ve know today and all of zis faded from memory, becoming myth and legend."

"If he's being sealed away, how is he coming back?" Hiccup asked.

"Though ze shadow is much weaker zan he once vas, he has vays of gazing his strength in ze material world," North answered, "Every five hundred years, zere is a meeting of ze sun and moon zat casts ze world in darkness, even during ze middle of the day."

"A meeting of the sun and moon?" Hiccup questioned in confusion before a thought occurred to him, "You're talking about an eclipse aren't you?"

As Hiccup talked, the shadows turned to the image of the sun and moon hanging over the Earth, drawing closer and closer together.

"_Da,_" North agreed with a nod, "But not like ze ones you might be knowing. Zis is a special time, for vhen ze spirits all entered ze spirit world, zey vere separated from one anozer in such a vay zat it became almost impossible for zem to interact. Zis eclipse is ze only time zat ze spirits of ze sun and moon can be vith one another anymore."

"That'sâ€¦that's terrible," Hiccup whispered sorrowfully as he reached out and rested his hand on top of Merida's. Merida, for her part, was watching the shadows as the image of the sun and moon transformed into a man and a woman reaching out towards one another.

"Vhat is vorse is vhat is coming vith it," North went on, "For as ze sun and moon come closer togezer, zey turn zeir attention away from ze material world, casting it in shadow. It is at zis time zat ze

shadow is at his strongest and can break back out of ze spirit world into ze material one."

As North talked, the shadows shifted again, showing the shadow spirit laughing as he grew larger and larger on the wall.

"This has happened before, hasn't it?" Hiccup questioned.

"Three times," North answered, holding up three fingers for emphasis, "It is being two millennia since ze spirits left zis world, and each time ze shadow has tried to return, he has been beaten back by ze great heroes of the time, though always at great cost."

"So, let me guess, it's that time of the millennium again?" Hiccup questioned sarcastically.

"_Da_," North confirmed with a grim nod.

"Fantastic," Hiccup stated with a weary sigh, "What I wouldn't give to have been born a century or two ago."

"Vat wouldn't ve all give?" North questioned with a laugh, "But ze truth is zat ve live in zis time and face ze shadow rising once more."

As Hiccup and North talked, Merida watched as the shadow grew larger and larger on the wall until it seemed to be looming over her.

"Ve must be gazing our strength against ze coming darkness," North explained, apparently oblivious to the darkening shadows, "I see now zat zat is ze other reason I have been sent here, to prepare ze two of you for ze trials ahead."

The shadow continued growing larger and seemed to be drawing closer to Merida, reaching a hand out towards Merida. Toothless seemed to notice this, perking his head up as he watched the shadow with Merida.

"And you must be prepared," North warned ominously, "For ze darkness gathers, and shadows hide in every corner."

The shadow drew closer and closer to Merida, reaching out its hand to grab her and swallow her whole, but the princess found herself unable to move, rooted to the floor by an all-encompassing dread. As the shadow approached, Toothless lowered his ears and narrowed his eyes, growling as he bared his teeth. Varis, for his part, began cawing loudly at the shadow as he flapped his wings violently.

"What's going on?" Hiccup asked, looking at Varis in confusion before turning his attention to Toothless, "What's wrong, bud?"

As the shadow drew nearer, Merida began to shake with fear, her pale flesh going milk white as her eyes went wide.

"Mer?" Hiccup questioned, placing his hand on Merida's shoulder as he noticed how violently she was shaking, apparently unable to see the shadow looming over both of them, "Merida, what's wrong?"

Meridaa watched in terror as the shadow's hand drew closer, inches away from touching her. Suddenly, Merida felt iron-hard fingers grasp

hold of her arm before yanking her to face away from the shadow. Spinning around, Merida found herself looking at North, her blue eyes meeting his.

"I would not stare so long into ze shadows, _Printessa,_" North said, any sound of mirth lost from his voice, "You are never knowing who is looking back."

"Mer, are you okay?" Hiccup asked, concern written on his face.

"Ah-Ah'm alright, Hic," Merida replied uneasily, rubbing her eyes with her hands, glancing to where the shadow had been and finding it gone, "Ah'm alright."

"Vat vere you seeing?" North questioned.

"Th' shadowsâ€|they started formin' pictures tae gae along with yer story," Merida explained as she wrapped her arms around herself while Hiccup put an arm around her shoulders, "Then they formed a man an' he started reachin' fer me. Ah felt scared, more scared then Ah've ever felt afore. Ah cudnae move, Ah cudnae breathe, Ah justâ€|"

Merida trailed off, tightening her grip on herself as Hiccup pulled her closer.

"I thought spirits couldn't affect the world like that," Hiccup mused as he looked to North for answers.

"Zere is much you still have to learn about spirits, Hiccup Dragonrider," North replied ominously, "Even zen, ze hour grows late, and e shadows grow long."

"There's no getting out of this, is there?" Hiccup questioned, looking at North with sad eyes, "We're in this, whether we want to be or not."

"_Da,_" North answered sadly, before a look of determination crossed his face, "Zat is vhy I must be preparing you for trials ahead. Ve start first zing in morning. I will be teaching you vhat I know, and, not to be bragging, but I am knowing a lot."

Hiccup and Merida smiled as they rose to their feet, Toothless following suit with a grunt.

"You two should be getting home," North stated as he planted his hands on his hips, "I don't vant your father to be vondering where you are."

North leaned closer to the two teenagers, a grin on his face.

"I am finding him to be very scary man," North whispered conspiratorially, causing Hiccup and Merida to chuckle.

"Have a good night, North," Hiccup said as he and Merida made their way towards the door.

"Thanks fer everythin'," Merida added as the two donned their coats and cloaks.

"Do not be zanking me yet," North said with a chuckle as the two opened the door and ushered Toothless out into the cold, Varis flying from his perch and landing on Merida's shoulder, "Ve are having much work to do! Ve rise viz ze sun!"

"See you then!" Hiccup called as he and Merida went trudging off into the snow, North giving a smile and a wave as he closed the door behind them.

Sighing, North turned away from the door. Glancing around, he saw that the room had seemingly grown darker than it had been a moment before. The fire burnt low in the fireplace and long shadows obscured most of the room. Suddenly, the creaking of floorboards brought North's attention to a corner of the room, where he could make out what looked like the hazy image of someone standing in the shadows. For a few tense moments, North stared into the shadows at the figure before smirking.

"Vill be taking more zan bumps in night to scare me," North declared before walking towards the stairs, "Much more."

Later,

Hiccup was preparing for bed, having hung up his winter clothes, kicked off his boot and removed his artificial leg. Before he could snuff out his bedside candle though, a soft knock came from his door a moment before Merida opened it and stuck her head through, a slightly embarrassed look on her face.

"Hey, Mer," Hiccup said, a look of concern on his face, "Everything alright?"

"Aye, sorry tae bother ye it's jistâ€|" Merida trailed off and bit her lip nervously before continuing, "Wud it be alright ifâ€|if Ah stayed with ye tonight?"

"This is about what you saw in the shadows, isn't it?" Hiccup questioned plainly.

Merida nodded her head, averting her eyes in embarrassment

. "I understand if you're scaredâ€|" Hiccup began to say.

"Ah ain't scared!" Merida snapped, glaring at Hiccup.

"I'm scared too," Hiccup finished, an understanding look on his face, "And I would appreciate the company."

Merida gave Hiccup an apologetic look before entering his room and quietly closing the door behind her. Quickly stripping off her leggings, Merida crawled into bed with Hiccup in her tunic and undergarments, quickly snuggling in next to him.

"Do you want me to leave the candle lit?" Hiccup asked.

"Nae," Merida answered as she reached up and extinguished the candle herself, "Ah've got ye. 'At's all Ah need."

A/N: This chapter took a little longer to write then I was expecting

but I think it turned out alright in the end. Lots of world building in this one, hope you guys liked it! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

4. By the Sword

****Chapter 4: By the Sword****

The sun shone brightly over the island of Berk, its rays reflecting off the white snow that covered the ground. North walked through the bustling village, smiling as he looked around at all the decorations that the villagers and their dragons were setting up, oblivious to the odd looks he was getting from the Vikings. All around him, strands of garland decorated with colorful ribbons woven in were being strung between the houses. As North approached the center of the village, he saw that a large pine tree had been brought from the forest and erected in the village. Currently, a number of children and dragons were putting colorful decorations on it.

As North marveled up at the tree, he accidentally walked into someone, the force of the blow knocking him back half a step. As he caught himself, North turned to find he had bumped into Fishlegs, who stood only half a head shorter than the jolly traveler.

"Oh, sorry Mr. uh North," Fishlegs apologized.

"No need to be apologizing, my friend," North replied with a chuckle, "I should be vatching where I am valking."

North looked Fishlegs up and down before realization crossed his face and he smiled.

"You are being Hiccup and Merida's friend!" he concluded, pointing a finger at Fishlegs, "Fishfeet, _da_?"

"Fishlegs, sir," Fishlegs corrected.

"_Da_, _of course," North agreed with a chuckle, "Hiccup and Merida are telling me much about you."

"They are?" Fishlegs questioned, crooking an eyebrow at North.

"_Da_!" North replied with a jolly laugh as he patted Fishlegs on the arm, "Strong arms, sharp mind and good heart. A very good combination, I am zeenking."

"Uh, thanks," Fishlegs replied bashfully.

"Be zeenking nozing of it," North replied, waving a dismissive hand, "Have you been seeing your friends zees morning?"

"Not yet," Fishlegs answered, shaking his head, "You might want to check the smithy. Hiccup likes to spend a lot of time there."

"I veell be doing zat, zank you," North said, patting Fishlegs on the shoulder before he began to walk away. North walked a few short feet before stopping and turning back to Fishlegs.

"Which way is being to ze smeezy?" North questioned bashfully.

Fishlegs pointed in the correct direction, earning a smile and a laugh from North who quickly set off in the direction Fishlegs had pointed. Fishlegs watched him go before smirking in amusement and shaking his head while heading off in his own direction.

North quickly made his way through the village, eventually finding his way to the smithy where smoke was slowly rising from the roof. As he reached the building, he knocked on the door before poking his head in, finding Hiccup working at the anvil with Merida sitting on a stool nearby with Varis perched on her shoulder. Toothless had curled up near the furnace, the Night Fury lifting his head up to look at North.

"_Dobroe utro_," he greeted happily as he glanced around before fully opening the door and stepping inside, "Is zees being your smeezy?"

"Good morning to you too," Hiccup greeted in bemusement, "And no, I'm just watching it for a friend."

"He's on holiday," Merida added as she turned to look at North as well.

"I see," North replied, looking around the shop before wandering over to a table and picking up Bemuhén from where it sat on the table, "Ahh, so zees is being ze sword you were talking about."

"Yeah," Hiccup answered as he walked over to North, watching as he examined the blade.

"Where is zees coming from?" North questioned as he handed the blade back to Hiccup.

"It's a bit of a long story," Hiccup replied as he took the sword with his left hand, causing North to crook an eyebrow at him, "I guess you could say it's a family heirloom."

"I am seeing," North replied, before glancing back at the sword, "Ze words, what are zey saying?"

"Bemuhén," Hiccup answered as he set the sword back down, "It's Old Norse for Endeavor."

"Good name for sword," North stated with a nod, before turning his attention towards the other object sitting on Hiccup's workbench, picking up Hiccup's crossbow and examining it, "And what ees being zees?"

"That's my crossbow," Hiccup answered.

"Crossbow?" North questioned with curiosity, "I am never hearing of zees weapon."

"That's because I invented it," Hiccup stated, smiling as North gave him an impressed look.

"I use to be fancying myself as inventor," North mused as he set the

crossbow back down, "Zough not of veapons."

"Whit of?" Merida inquired.

"Toys," North answered with a chuckle and a shrug before sighing "Zat was being a long time ago."

Looking between Merida and Hiccup, North smiled again.

"So, who am I to be starting with today?" North questioned, clapping his hands together and rubbing them together eagerly.

"Hiccup is," Merida stated as she stood up from her seat, "Ah'm gaein' tae gae see if Ah can find any way o' trackin' down yer friend."

"How are you going to be doing zat?" North questioned.

"Ah hae a good idea o' where tae start," Merida replied before kissing Hiccup on the cheek, grabbing her cloak and moving to the door, "Try nae tae kill ane another while Ah'm gone."

"No need to be vorrying, _Printessa_, he ees being in good hands," North stated with a large smile before slapping Hiccup on the back, almost knocking the young man over in the process.

"Ah can see 'at," Merida replied with a chuckle before shaking her head and walking out the door.

"So, what exactly are you planning on teaching me today?" Hiccup questioned, rubbing the spot on his back where North had hit him.

"How to fight, and for zat," North said as he picked Bemuen back up and handed it to Hiccup, "You are going to be needing zees."

Hiccup took the sword before looking nervously up at North, the large man grinning widely back at him.

A few minutes later, Hiccup, now dressed in his winter clothing with his horned helmet on and a round, wooden shield strapped to his right arm, stood across from North in the small clearing behind the smithy. Toothless sat on the edge of the clearing, sunning himself on a rock.

"First," North said as he unsheathed his mismatched swords and spun them around with a flourish, "Ve are going to be seeing how much you are knowing about fighting."

Sliding into a fighting stance, North grinned at Hiccup.

"Ready for when you are being so," North stated.

Gulping, Hiccup reached up and pulled Bemuen out of the sheath strapped to his back.

"Left handed," North observed, "Interesting."

Hesitantly, Hiccup approached North with his shield raised, causing the larger man to chuckle.

"Zee first move is being yours," North stated as he stood at the ready.

Nodding in reply, Hiccup stepped forward and swung his sword at North. North easily batted the attack away with Nice before swinging Naughty at Hiccup. Hiccup managed to just barely lift his shield up and block the attack, Naughty's metal teeth biting into the wood as the force of the blow spinning Hiccup around and forcing him to stumble away.

"Too slow," North said, dropping his guard and shaking his head as Hiccup caught himself, "You are being much too slow."

Turning to face North, Hiccup rushed forward as best he could on his mismatched legs and thrust his sword at the larger man.

"Good zrust," North observed as he easily sidestepped the attack, "But you have overextended yourself."

Swinging with Naughty, North caught Bemuhlen in his sword's serrated blade before tugging the sword out of Hiccup's hand, causing it to clatter to the ground. As Hiccup looked at his sword in surprise, North kicked him in the chest, sending the young man stumbling backwards. As he did, North swung at him with Naughty, forcing the off-balance Hiccup to raise his sword to block. Naughty's metal teeth dug into the shield again, biting down on the wood, allowing North to yank Hiccup back towards him while wrenching the young man's shield off his arm. Stepping aside to let Hiccup stumble past him, North hooked Hiccup's foot with his own, sending the Viking tumbling end over end across the ground. As Hiccup rolled to a stop, North shook the young man's shield off his sword, causing it to land on the frozen ground with a thud.

"So, I am seeing you are not knowing much," North observed as he stepped over to where Bemuhlen lay on the ground, "I am being surprised you've survived as you have. Did you not kill ze Demon Bear?"

"That had to do with a lot of other things," Hiccup replied as he pushed himself to his feet, huffing and puffing as he glanced to the side, noticing a few villagers had come over to watch, drawn by the sound of the two men's spar, "He had me pretty beat on the sword-fighting thing."

"I am seeing why," North stated as he looped his foot under Bemuhlen and kicked it into the air at Hiccup, who barely managed to catch it, "Again."

Hiccup eyed North in confusion before walking forward and reaching down for his shield. Before he could grab it though, North swung down and struck the shield with Naughty, forcing Hiccup to yank his hand back. Hiccup stared incredulously up at North, who only looked impassively back at the young man. Hesitantly, Hiccup reached for the shield again, only for North to smack it again, forcing the young man to take a hesitant step back. Growing frustrated, Hiccup quickly reached for the shield again only for North to swing Nice down on it, slicing the mangled shield in two.

"Hey!" Hiccup shouted angrily, "What the Hel!?"

"You veell not be needing shield," North answered calmly, "You are being too small. Must be quick, not tough. Shield slows you down."

Kicking the remains of the shield away, North fell back into a fighting stance.

"Now come," North insisted, "Again!"

Growling to himself, Hiccup rushed forward, swinging his sword wildly, the flurry of blows forcing North back a few steps as he parried the blows.

"Good, good," North encouraged over the clanging of steel on steel, "Using left hand gives advantage. Most train veeth right hand. Use to attack from opposite direction. Most men vell be having hard time parrying blows."

"You seem to be having a pretty easy time with it," Hiccup observed as he continued to attack North.

"I am not being most men," North replied with a wry grin as he caught Bemuhén between his swords before shoving the young man back and going on the attack.

Stumbling backward, Hiccup barely managed to get his sword up in time to block North's attack, the Viking teen backpedaling as North continued to rain attacks down on him.

"Attacks are being very sloppy," North observed as he continued to force Hiccup back, "I am seeing zem miles away."

With a swift kick to the midsection, North knocked Hiccup off his feet and back onto the cold, hard ground.

"Your stance is being veak as vell," North added.

"Well, that's probably because I'm missing a leg!" Hiccup shouted in frustration as he pushed himself to his feet again, eyeing the growing crowd of villagers and dragons that was gathering to watch.

"No excuses!" North argued back, "Excuses mean you are not being wrong, but you are. And when you are being wrong, you can be being feexed. And when you are feexed, you are being better. Understanding?"

Hiccup nodded as he tried to catch his breath.

"Good," North said with a nod of his own before sliding back into his stance, "Again!"

Rushing forward, Hiccup took a few more swings at North, forcing the larger man back a few steps, their blades flashing in the morning sun as they cut through the air. As Hiccup thrust Bemuhén at North again, the Rus pushed the attack to the side, causing the young man to stumble forward. Acting on instinct, Hiccup reached out and grabbed hold of North by the man's coat to stop himself. With lightning reflexes, North used a few of the fingers on his other hand to grab

Hiccup's wrist before kicking the young man's legs out from under him and flipping him onto the ground.

Hiccup groaned in pain and lay on his back for a moment before pushing himself back to his feet.

"You know," Hiccup said as he tried to catch his breath, "You might have an advantage with the whole two swords thing."

"I am being sure we can be finding you another sword," North replied with a sly grin, "If you are banting to be stopping, that is."

"No," Hiccup answered with determination, "Let's keep going."

"Hiccup," Stoick said as he pushed his way through the crowd, "What the Hel's goin' on here?"

"Or not," Hiccup stated before he turned to look at his father, "Nothing, Dad. North just offered to help train me is all."

"Since when have you been interested in sword fightin'?" Stoick questioned.

"Well, I've always been kind of interested in it, I've just never been any good at it," Hiccup answered with a shrug, "I figured with everything that's been happening lately, now might be a good time to start getting good at it."

"As good as that is, I'm not sure how I feel about a stranger swingin' swords at my son," Stoick stated, shooting a pointed gaze at North.

"Trust me, we are being completely safe," North replied reassuringly.

"Your coat's on fire," Stoick stated matter-of-factly.

Whipping his head around to look at his arm, North saw that the spot on his sleeve where Hiccup had grabbed him had caught fire, a thin trail of smoke rising from the quickly burning cloth. Letting out a shout of surprise, North dropped his swords to the ground before he began batting at the fire with his hand, which only served to catch his other sleeve on fire. North panicked for a moment, waving his flaming arms around before he pulled off his coat and threw it on ground where he proceeded to stomp the flames out with his feet. The crowd watched with wide eyes before slowly everyone turned to look at Hiccup.

Hiccup looked on in shock as well before slowly turning his attention towards his right hand. The intricate burn on his hand was slowly fading from an angry red as steam rose from Hiccup's palm.

"On second thought," North said as he rubbed his singed arms, "Maybe we are not needing to be finding you second sword."

"Are you alright, son?" Stoick questioned as he walked over to Hiccup's side.

"Yeah, it's fine, it just feels a little hot," Hiccup replied as the

glow from the scar began to fade, "I didn't evenâ€¦"

Hiccup trailed off as he looked up at his father, blinking in confusion as a snowflake passed between them. Stoick noticed it too, looking at the offending snowflake in bewilderment before turning his eyes skyward, where he saw grey clouds quickly covering the sky.

"That's strange," Stoick mused, "The sky was clear just a moment ago."

Suddenly, the sounds of commotion drew their attention to the crowd, who were all looking at something. Hiccup followed their gaze as Toothless left his place on the rock and joined his side, the two of them looking up at the mountain that marked the center of the island, where swirling clouds had covered it almost to its base.

"Hiccup," North said, bringing Hiccup's attention back to him as he regarded the young man with a serious expression, all the mirth gone from his eyes, "I am Zeenking ve should be finding your _printessa _now."

A short time earlier,

A small group of teenagers made their way through the snow-covered woods that occupied most of the island. Merida led the group which consisted of Fishlegs, Astrid and Snotlout. With them was a pair of teenagers who appeared to be twins, a girl and a boy. Both had long, light blonde hair and blue eyes, the girl having a pair of short braids on the side of her head. They both wore brown leather boots, black wool breeches, brown fur coats and dark green cloaks along with iron helmets with four horns each.

"Explain to me again why we couldn't just fly here?" Snotlout whined as they followed Merida through the woods.

"Because it's in the middle o' th' wood, Snot," Merida answered as she pushed through some undergrowth, "Ah daenae think our dragons wud appreciate it if we sent them crashin' through th' trees. Besides, it's nae 'at far."

"I'm with Snotlout," the male twin spoke up, "Walking kind of loses its luster when you have awesome dragons you could be riding."

"Well, it would have been easier if you guys didn't insist we bring our weapons along," Fishlegs replied as he adjusted the warhammer that was strapped to his back.

"Hey, we've got to get used to carrying out weapons around, we're true Viking warriors now," the male twin answered, "Though it would be easier if we had our dragons carrying the weapons for us."

"Look Tuff, Ah didnae bring ye lot along sae 'at Ah cud listen tae yer bellyachin'," Merida said as she shot the young man a glare before she pushed aside some bushes, "Besides, we're already here."

Pushing aside the brush, Merida allowed the others to pass into a clearing that was dominated by a ring of large standing stones. Each

of the stones looked like they had been placed there centuries ago with weather worn and rune carved surfaces.

"Huh, it may have been the Vendal we were fighting," the twin girl said as she looked up at the monoliths, "But last time I was here, I don't remember it feeling soâ€¦|soâ€¦|"

"Ominous, Ruff?" Astrid provided.

"That's the one," the girl replied, snapping her fingers before pointing at Astrid.

"Yeah, this place still gives me the creeps," Fishlegs concurred.

"Come on," Merida said as she began leading them to the other side of the clearing, "We didnae come here tae stare at rocks."

"Speaking of which, what did we come here for, Princess?" Snotlout questioned as the group followed Merida to a path cut through the undergrowth, "I mean, I know I'm here to check out this witch's hut, but why are you here?"

"Ah'm hopin' tae learn saemethin' from whit she left behind," Merida explained as they walked down the overgrown path, "Ah've been meanin' tae come here fer a while now but Ah justâ€¦|cudnae."

Merida's face fell as she felt someone put their hand on her shoulder. Turning, she found Astrid smiling sympathetically at her.

"Hey, it's totally understandable," Astrid said, "I may not have known her but I can tell that she meant a lot to you. You just needed time."

"Thanks," Merida replied as she reached up and touched Astrid's hand, the blonde smiling at her before pulling her hand back. By that time, they had reached another, shady clearing that was occupied by a small house that had been built into the roots of a great, old tree.

"So, she lived out here by herself?" Ruff questioned as they all looked around the clearing.

"She had some company," Merida replied as she reached up and stroked Varis' feathers, earning a happy qwork from the crow.

Walking up to the door, Merida tried to open it but found it stuck. After struggling with the door for a moment, she managed to force the door open, allowing the group entrance into the home. It was a simple dwelling, occupied largely by a number of wooden carvings that sat on shelves and tables around the home. The home was divided into a few rooms, such as a kitchen, a workroom and a bedroom, each of the room occupied by wooden and wicker pieces of furniture. The workroom was occupied by a workbench covered in discarded tools and scraps of wood. A large black cauldron sat over a cold firepit in the center of the kitchen.

"She had a thing for carving wood, I take it," Tuff observed as he picked up a woodcarving of what looked like a hut sitting on chicken legs.

"Among other thin's," Merida replied as she ran her hand along the workbench, frowning at the layer of dust that now covered her fingers.

"It's freezing in here," Fishlegs observed with a shiver.

"I'll see if I can get a fire going," Astrid said as she walked over to the firepit and began looking around for kindling to light a fire.

"So, what exactly are you hoping to find here, Merida?" Fishlegs questioned as he walked up next to the princess.

"Ah daenae know," Merida replied with a sigh as she scanned her surroundings, "A book? A scroll? Anythin' she cud hae left behind tae help us find oot more about this Jack fellow an' whit he's daein' on Berk."

"Is that the only reason?" Fishlegs pressed, giving Merida a questioning look.

"â€|Nae," Merida replied after a moment's hesitation, "Somethin' is happenin' tae me, Fish. Somethin's been happenin' tae me fer th' last year, an' whatever it is, Ah think it happened tae Hilde ance upon a time too."

Fishlegs gave Merida a small smile before reaching down and patting her on the shoulder.

"I'll see what I can find," Fishlegs said with a nod before he turned away and began searching through the house.

As the other's looked around, Astrid had managed to find some flint and tinder that she used to start a fire under the cauldron. The fire's glow spread throughout the room, the cauldron casting shadows on the ceiling. As the room lightened, Snotlout happened to glance behind him, his eyes widening as he saw a shelf full of dusty books.

"Hey, Fishlegs, check it out," Snotlout said as he reached up and pulled one of the books off the shelf and held it up for the other Viking to see as he turned to face him, "Looks like this lady had something right up your alley."

Walking over, Fishlegs took the book from Snotlout, glancing it over before turning his attention to the other side of the cottage.

"Merida!" he said, catching the redhead's attention, "I think you should come take a look at this."

Walking over, Merida smiled as she saw the shelf of books.

"This is jist th' type o' thin' 'at Ah was lookin' fer," Merida said as she took a different book off the shelf and blew the layer of dust off of it before smiling up at Fishlegs, "Great work, Fish."

"Hey! I'm the one who found the stupid things," Snotlout argued indignantly as he crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Good on ye, Snot," Merida replied condescendingly as she patted Snotlout on the shoulder, earning a grunt from the young man as he rolled his eyes at her.

"So, what do they say?" Ruff questioned as she sat down in one of the wicker chairs.

"It might take a while to find out," Fishlegs said with a sigh as he looked over the contents of the book, "It's all written in Old Norse runes."

"Dae ye think ye can decipher it?" Merida asked hopefully.

"It will take some time," Fishlegs answered, "But yeah, I think I can do it."

"Thanks, Fish," Merida said with a sigh as she reached out and pat Fishlegs on his arm.

"Well, I guess we should get settled in," Astrid said as she brushed soot off of her hands.

As the others began looking around for something to pass the time and Fishlegs began pouring over one of the books, Merida began flipping through a different one. To her pleasure, she found that the book contained a few illustrations scattered throughout its pages.

Stopping on one picture, she saw the illustration of a woman. She was a beautiful woman, with angular features and a pale complexion. She wore an elegant dress that appeared to be made of multi-colored feathers and her hair was a rainbow of colors as well. A cloud of songbirds and hummingbirds flitted around her. Merida gingerly touched the picture of the woman before flipping through the book to another illustration.

The next picture she found caused Merida to raise an eyebrow. The illustration depicted an anthropomorphic rabbit, a male one if she had to guess. He was lean and athletic looking, with strange markings on his purplish-grey fur. He wore a few pieces of leather armor and some unusual looking weapons in holsters on his hips. His arms were crossed in front of his chest and he looked forward with a determined expression. Merida looked over the picture for a few more moments before flipping through the book some more.

The next illustration that Merida found sent a chill down her spine. The illustration depicted a tall, gaunt man cloaked in shadow. He appeared to be wearing a black colored robe of some kind, though it was hard to differentiate it from the shadows that surrounded him. His hair was short, black, and swept back. His skin had a bluish-grey pigment to it and his eyes were bright yellow. Merida stared at the picture for a few moments, the blood slowly draining from her face before she squeezed her eyes shut, shook her head and turned the page.

Merida continued flipping through the book until she came to an illustration near the end of the book. The picture depicted a young man, not much older than Merida herself. He had a slim build and a pale complexion with pure white hair and clear blue eyes. He wore a

light blue cloak over a similarly colored tunic and brown colored breeches. His feet were completely bare and he carried with him an old worn staff that was shaped like a shepherd's crook.

As Merida looked at the picture, she suddenly felt a chill go through her entire body. As a shiver went through her, she let out a raggedy breath which came out in a white puff. A confused look crossed Merida's face before she spun around to look around the cottage. Looking at her friends, she saw them sitting around the cottage as if nothing had happened. As Merida looked at her friends, something moving in the corner of her eye caught her attention. Looking up at a corner near the ceiling of the cottage she saw a figure crouched on top of another shelf. Her icy blue eyes met with the figure's clear blue ones as they widened in surprise before she felt another chill go through her.

Merida was about to let out a shout of warning before a gust of cold wind suddenly kicked up in the middle of the cottage, the swirling winds forcing the teens to cover their faces as dust kicked up, books slammed closed and the fire under the cauldron gutted out. Merida coughed from the cloud of dust as she stumbled backwards against a wall, covering her face against the flying debris. Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the wind stopped though a pervasive chill still hung in the air.

Merida slowly lowered her arms from her face, revealing that the darkened cottage had been covered in a thin layer of snow. Her friends were all in a similar state as she was, recovering from the surprise blast of wind. What caught Merida's attention though was the person standing right in front of her.

He was the spitting image of the young man Merida had seen in the last pages of the book. He was pointing his staff at Merida with one hand, the crooked end inches away from her face, allowing her to see the layer of permafrost that covered the wood. Merida looked past the staff to the young man who was glaring at her with his clear blue eyes. Merida shivered again as she met his eyes, the cold in the air seeping into her very bones.

"Now, I'm only going to ask you this once," Jack Frost said with a warning tone, "Who are you and where is Hilde?"

A/N: Well, this chapter has been a long time coming. I hope you guys liked it, because I once again had a lot of fun writing it. Hope you guys enjoyed it as well! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

5. Icy Reception

Chapter 5: Icy Reception

"We have to be hurrying!" North announced as Hiccup rushed back into the smithy, the Rus wearing his coat again despite the sleeves having been burnt off almost to the elbow, "I am not knowing what is happening, but I am knowing that is Jack and I am knowing that is bad."

"Yeah, no kidding!" Hiccup shouted back, quickly pulling off his cloak, coat and scabbard so that he could throw on his flight

harness, "We have to get up there and see what is going on."

"If we are needing to get up there so soon, why are you wasting time here smithy?" North questioned from the doorway as Toothless stood beside him, fidgeting anxiously as Hiccup strapped on the harness before pulling on his gloves.

"There's no quicker form of travel than the back of a Night Fury," Hiccup answered as he grabbed his crossbow and quiver, strapped the two of them to his belt, threw his scabbard and cloak back on and rushed out the door before hopping onto Toothless' back and strapping in.

"Hiccup, wait!" Stoick said as he ran up to his son's side, "You can't go up there son, it's too dangerous. We don't know what we're dealing with."

"I can't just sit here and wait, Dad," Hiccup argued with a look of stubborn determination, "Merida's up there. I have to do something!"

"She's not the only one," Fishguts announced as he ran up to them, "She came by and collected Fishlegs before she left. Sounded like she was bring all of their friends with them too."

"So, the whole lot of them is up there," Spitelout surmised from Stoick's side as he shot a worried glance at the storm covered mountain.

"We need to get up there, Dad," Hiccup pressed as Toothless grunted impatiently underneath him, "We have to stop whatever's going on before it gets out of hand."

Stoick gave his son a worried look before sighing and nodding reluctantly.

"You're right," Stoick relented before putting his hand on his son's shoulder and giving it a squeeze, "Get goin'. We'll be right behind you."

Hiccup smiled and nodded his head before urging Toothless upward. Toothless shot into the air with a beat of his large wings, kicking up a cloud of snow in his wake. Within seconds, Hiccup and Toothless became nothing more than a dot in the distance shooting towards the mountain. Stoick watched him go before turning his attention towards North.

"Aren't you supposed to be helpin' him?" Stoick questioned.

"_Da,_ which ees why I am leaving now," North replied as he began walking away.

"You won't make it very fast on foot," Stoick pointed out.

"Which ees why I am not going on foot," North replied before bringing his fingers up to his mouth and blowing a loud whistle. Moments later, the thunderous pounding of hooves could be heard throughout the village before Donner came charging around a corner, the villagers scattering to get out of the reindeer's way. As Donner approached him, North reached up and hooked his arm around the

reindeer's neck before swinging himself up onto the animal's back as it sped past.

"Come Donner," North said as they sped through the city, "Let us be showing zem a trick!"

With a snort, Donner ran straight at a house, leaping into the air as he drew closer to it. Landing on the roof, Donner took another mighty leap, sending them both flying into the air. Instead of falling, Donner began pumping his legs as if he was running upon the air, which carried him higher and higher into the air. As the villagers looked on in astonishment, North let out a deep belly laugh before he and Donner disappeared over the tree line.

"Well," Spitelout said, a shocked look on his face, "I guess we wasn't lying about the reindeer."

"Guess not," Stoick agreed before turning his attention towards the gathered villagers, "Everyone, listen up! I need anyone who has a dragon and feels comfortable enough on it to mount up and get out there. The rest of you will make their way there on foot with me. I don't know what we'll find up there, but I need every able and willin' sword. Who's with me?"

A cry went up from the crowd as a majority of the villagers volunteered.

"Good," Stoick replied with a nod, "Now get ready, we needed to leave five minutes ago. Everyone else, take shelter in your homes. It looks like there's a storm coming."

With that, the villagers and dragons sprang into action, running in every direction as they prepared for the possibility of battle.

"You think this will all be necessary?" Spitelout questioned, following Stoick as he began making his way towards his home.

"I don't know," Stoick admitted, "But I don't want to be caught off guard if it is."

"Do you really think we can fight a god?" Spitelout asked uncertainly.

"I don't know, I've never fought one," Stoick stated before turning and giving Spitelout a look of determination, "But if this Jack Frost thinks he can come onto my island and drop a blizzard on our heads, he's got another thing comin'."

Meanwhile,

Merida tried to force herself to remain calm despite the fact her heart was hammering in her chest. Her eyes were locked with Jack's, the end of his staff still inches from her face, something she innately knew was dangerous. Varis was cawing madly in the corner of the room, but besides that the cottage was deathly silent.

"I asked you a question," Jack stated, his tone threatening, "Don't make me ask it again."

"Ahâ€|Ah knew Hilde," Merida managed to get out, "Sheâ€|She was a

friend o' mine. Ah'm guessin' she was a friend o' yers too."

"Don't change the subject!" Jack snapped, pointing the end of his staff closer to Merida's face, "What do you mean you knew her? Where is she!?"

"She'sâ€|she's nae here anymore," Merida replied, dreading telling Jack the truth.

"What do you mean!?" Jack demanded angrily.

"She's dead, Jack," Merida answered simply, "She's gone."

The truth seemed to strike Jack like a blow to the face sending him reeling. For a moment, his face fell with sadness and he lowered his staff slightly, causing Merida to sigh in relief. Then, in a flash, Jack's sorrow was replaced with anger and he turned to glare at Merida as he raised his staff back to her face.

"Who did this!?" Jack demanded, "This place was supposed to be safe! No one was supposedâ€|"

Jack trailed off as a look of realization passed over his features, quickly replaced with anger once more.

"You did this!" Jack shouted at Merida.

"Nae!" Merida replied, "Nae, Ah swear we didnae! She was ma friend!"

"LIAR!" Jack shouted back, "You're working with that bastard Mor'du, aren't you!? You lead him straight to her!"

"Ah didnae, Ah swear! She was ma friend, ye hae tae-" Merida cut herself short, a look of shock on her face as she looked past Jack, "Snotlout, daenae!"

As Merida shouted out her warning, Snotlout let out a loud shout as he leapt at Jack from behind. Eyes widening, Jack whipped around before thrusting his hand at Snotlout as the young man flew through the air at him. A second later, a powerful gust of icy wind sprang from Jack's outstretched hand, hitting Snotlout square in the chest. The force of the blow completely reversed Snotlout's momentum, sending him shooting backwards through the air right into the cottage door. Snotlout's momentum shattered the door, sending him flying outside in a storm of splinters. The ripple of the wind shook the whole cottage, knocking the other teens to the ground as small objects went flying in the blast's wake. Merida looked on in shock before turning her attention back to Jack, only to find he was no longer standing in front of her, but was somehow already at the door, stepping through the broken frame to follow Snotlout into the clearing outside.

Snotlout groaned in pain as he tried to pick himself up, snowflakes swirling around him. Hearing footsteps crunching through the fresh snow, Snotlout turned to look, his eyes widening in fear as he saw Jack stalking towards him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Snotlout said as he scrambled to his feet, holding his hands out towards Jack, "Easy there, pal. I think you and

I have gotten off on the wrong foot here."

Jack ignored Snotlout as he drew closer to the young man, the increasingly turbulent weather swirling around him.

"The princess was telling the truth, you know," Snotlout continued as he took a few hesitant steps away from Jack, "We didn't have anything to do with the old lady's death. Honest."

Jack continued forward, deaf to Snotlout's words, the snow on the ground stirring in his wake.

"Come on man, we canâ€¦|" Snotlout began to say before sighing, "Ah, to Hel with it."

With a shout, Snotlout pulled his mace off of his belt before taking a swing at Jack's head. Jack easily sidestepped the attack before spinning around Snotlout as the young man swung at him again. Spinning around, Snotlout took a third swing at Jack, which the godling dodged by planting his staff in the ground and bending over backwards at the knees, allowing the attack to sail over him. As the momentum spun Snotlout around, Jack grasped his staff with two hands before lifting himself off the ground. As Snotlout finished his spin, Jack kicked him twice in the chest and once across the jaw, sending the Viking sprawling.

Flipping back to his feet, Jack pulled his staff out of the ground as Snotlout picked himself up off the ground and charged at Jack again. Jack easily parried Snotlout's first attack before spinning his staff around to block Snotlout's follow up. Snotlout went on the offensive with a half a dozen more swings, each of which Jack blocked with his spinning staff or sidestepped with graceful ease. As Snotlout swung at him from the side, Jack blocked the attack with one arm before looping the crook of his staff around the Viking's neck and pulling the young man's head down as the spirit thrust his knee upwards, slamming the two together. As the blow sent Snotlout reeling, Jack unhooked his staff from the young man's neck before spinning it around and smacking the young man across the face with it, knocking him to the ground.

Snotlout groaned in pain as he tried to push himself back to his feet, Jack spinning his staff around as he approached the Viking. Before Jack reached Snotlout, he heard the sounds of footsteps rapidly approaching him from behind. Turning, he found Ruff and Tuff rushing at him, weapons at the ready. Tuff reached him first, thrusting one end of his double-ended spear at Jack. Jack easily parried the attack, pushing the spear to the side and stepping around Tuff as the young man stumbled past him. Stepping towards Ruff, Jack watched as she leapt into the air, swinging her hatchet down at him. Lifting up his staff, Jack blocked the swing, before turning Ruff's momentum to the side. As she stumbled to a stop, Jack spun and tried to backhand Ruff, but she ducked the blow and spun around to face him. Gripping her dagger in her other hand, Ruff stabbed at Jack, but the godling managed to dodge and catch her hand on his staff. Ruff quickly followed up with another swing of her hatchet, but Jack managed to catch this attack with the other end of his staff. With both of her weapons blocked on his staff, Jack spun them both around so the two of them were facing away from one another while sliding his staff over Ruff's neck. Ruff struggled against him for a moment before Jack pulled forward, flipping her over his back and tossing

her to the ground.

As Ruff tried to pick herself up, Tuff came rushing at Jack once more. Jack gracefully sidestepped Tuff's thrust before blocking the Viking's follow-up swing. Jack quickly pushed back on the spear, knocking it to the side before he stepped forward and slammed his palm against Tuff's chest, sending the young man stumbling backwards. Unbalanced, Tuff was unable to defend himself as Jack rushed him. Swinging low, Jack struck the inside of one of Tuff's legs before swinging back and hitting the other one, forcing Tuff into a spread position. Jack quickly followed up by swinging his staff upwards, hitting Tuff right in the groin, causing the young man to wheeze in pain as he doubled over. As Tuff fell to his knees, Jack spun his staff around and planted the butt of the weapon against the young man's chest before thrusting it forward, the force of which sent Tuff rolling across the snow covered ground.

Hearing another person approaching him, Jack turned to face Ruff as she charged at him again. Jack easily blocked her first few strikes before catching her again as Ruff took a leaping lunge at him with both of her weapons. As Ruff landed with her weapons caught, Jack quickly spun his staff vertically in front of him which lifted Ruff up and spun her through the air as well. As Ruff landed in a heap on the ground, Jack reached out and snatched his still spinning staff from the air. As Ruff pushed herself to her hands and knees, Jack grabbed his staff near the end with both hands before stepping forward and swinging downward, hitting Ruff in the stomach and sending her tumbling across the clearing, the force of the blow kicking up some of the snow on the ground around Jack.

"This is getting out of hand," Fishlegs said as he, Astrid and Merida stepped out of the cottage, watching as Snotlout, Ruff and Tuff picked themselves up and charged at Jack again.

"We hae tae stop them afore someane gets hurt," Merida stated.

"Or worse," Astrid added grimly.

With all three teens attacking him at once, Jack was forced to constantly keep on the both, spinning in place as he dodged and blocked Snotlout, Ruff and Tuff's attacks. Growing frustrated, Jack spun his staff above his head, forcing the three Vikings back and giving Jack enough room to slam the butt of his staff against the ground, creating a burst of wind that swirled outwards from Jack and sent the teens flying.

Snotlout let out a grunt of pain as he rolled to a stop on his back, shaking his head until his vision cleared, revealing Merida standing over him against the stormy sky above.

"Look at whit ye've done, ye bleedin' moron!" Merida growled down at Snotlout as the young man sat up.

"What I've done?" Snotlout questioned incredulously as he pushed himself back to his feet, "I saved your life!"

"Ah was tryin' tae talk him doon!" Merida shouted back, "Ye savin' me may hae killed us all!"

A look of fear passed over Snotlout's features before he and Merida

turned to look back at Jack. Merida let out a shocked gasp as she saw Jack step over Tuff, planting his foot on the young man's chest and gripping his staff with two hands, holding it at the ready to stab the Viking with as the end of it began to glow an icy blue.

Tuff let out a frightened cry as Jack moved to stab him, only to freeze in place as an arrow went whizzing past his face. Glancing to the side, Jack saw that the arrow had struck a tree at the edge of the clearing, the missile vibrating with unspent energy. Glancing in the other direction, Jack found Merida standing a short distance away with her bow pointed at him, another arrow already notched on the quivering string.

'At was a warnin' shot," Merida warned as she glared at Jack, "Ah wonae miss again, sae Ah suggest ye step off ma friend."

"You're friends attacked me," Jack shot back, not moving from his spot.

"After ye threatened me!" Merida argued, growing angrier by the second.

"For good reason," Jack growled, "You were the ones who broke into her house and went rummaging through her things like a pack of common thieves. What kind of friend would do that!?"

"It wasnae like 'at!" Merida shouted back, angry tears welling up in her eyes.

"Of course it wasn't," Jack spat as he glared into Merida's eyes "But it's what you did all the same. I don't know how Hilde died, whether you killed her or not, but I know one thing for sure."

Merida trembled as Jack spoke, barely able to keep her bow trained on him.

"It's your fault Hilde's dead," Jack finished, "I can see it in your eyes."

"SHUT UP!" Merida screamed as she loosed the arrow at Jack, tears streaming down her face. As it reached him, Jack batted the arrow away with his staff before thrusting a hand at Merida. A blast of freezing wind shot out of Jack's outstretched hand, kicking up loose snow as it shot across the clearing and struck Merida in the chest, knocking her clear off her feet and sending her flying through the air before slamming onto the ground.

"Merida!" Fishlegs shouted in fear as he rushed over to where she had landed, scooping her into his arms, finding her chest covered in a thin layer of frost. Merida's face was pale and her lips had turned dark blue as she shivered violently in Fishlegs' arms.

"You bastard!" Tuff shouted at Jack as he reached for his spear only for the godling to slam his foot against the Viking's chest again and raise his staff to try and stab the young man a second time. Before he could, something came charging in from the side, knocking him off of Tuff's chest, carrying him through the air a short distance before lifting him up and slamming him onto the frozen ground with enough force to crack it. Jack let out a wheezing cough of pain as he looked up to see Astrid stepping over him.

"I'm going to make you regret that," Astrid threatened as she pulled her waraxe out of the holster on her back, twirled it in her hand and spun to face Jack as the spirit picked himself up off the ground. Growling, Jack rushed at Astrid, swinging his staff at her. Astrid batted the attack away with her axe before swinging it back at Jack's head, forcing the godling to lean back to avoid the blade. Using her momentum to her advantage, Astrid spun in place and swung her axe at Jack again, forcing the spirit to duck the attack. Spinning as he ducked, Jack tried to sweep Astrid's legs but she nimbly jumped over his staff before snapping out a kick, hitting the godling in the back and sending him tumbling across the ground.

Rolling to his feet, Jack rushed at Astrid and swung his staff at her again. Astrid lifted her axe to block but with a sudden twist, Jack managed to hook the crook of his staff around her weapon. With a yank, Jack pulled the axe out of Astrid's grasp before spinning his staff around and hurling the axe across the clearing where it imbedded itself into the side of a tree.

For half a second, Astrid looked shocked before she turned her attention back to Jack as the spirit spun around and swung at her again. Astrid ducked under Jack's swing before flipping over his staff as he swung it back around to try and sweep her legs. As Jack tried to pull his staff back, Astrid rushed him, hopping up and planting her feet against his chest before bouncing off of him sending Jack skidding across the icy ground as she backflipped and landed a short distance away.

As Jack caught himself, he looked to find Astrid already rushing him. Jack swung his staff blindly at Astrid, only for the blonde to duck under the attack before reaching up and grabbing his weapon with one hand. Holding Jack's staff in place, Astrid spun around and slammed her elbow into Jack's stomach, sending him stumbling back a few paces. As Jack caught himself Astrid spun away before they both grabbed his staff with two hands. Jack tried to push her away, only for Astrid to lean into him, causing him to skid across the ground as she pushed him backwards. Growling in frustration, Jack planted his feet before leaping into the air, keeping a hold on his staff as he flipped over Astrid. With the staff still in their hands and their arms outstretched behind them, Jack pulled his staff down, flipping Astrid over his head. Jack was expecting Astrid to let go of his staff and get sent flying away, but to his shock, she held firm, landing on the balls of her feet in front of him with enough force to kick up a cloud of snowflakes, his staff still grasped firmly in her hands.

Astrid lifted her head to look at Jack, smirking as she saw the shocked look on his face. Gripping the staff tightly, Astrid planted her feet before yanking to the side, pulling Jack off his feet as she spun. After completing her spin, Astrid let go of Jack's staff, sending the spirit tumbling through the air before he crashed into a nearby tree, sending broken branches tumbling to the ground as he slammed against one of the thicker branches.

Astrid smirked and gave a satisfied nod before she began walking towards the tree that her axe was stuck in. Before she could, a sudden crash brought her attention to the tree that she had just thrown Jack into. Looking at it, she saw Jack leaping out of the tree before running at her full sprint as he landed. As Jack ran, he

dragged his staff along the ground behind him, creating a violent wake of wind and snow behind him. Before Astrid could react, Jack was on her, spinning around and swinging his staff at Astrid, the blast of snow and wind following behind him hitting her full force. The blast sent Astrid flying into the air, the momentum carrying her across the clearing before slamming into the trunk of a tree, chunks of bark sent flying by the impact. Astrid stayed against the trunk for a few moments before she slid off and began falling. As she fell, Astrid hit a thick branch with her torso, which spun her so she slammed against the next one on her back. Astrid groaned in pain as she slid off and fell the rest of the way to the frozen ground below. Groaning in pain, Astrid tried to push herself to her feet before letting out a sharp cry and grabbing her arm as she fell back to the ground.

Fishlegs looked on in horror as he watched Jack approach Astrid, Merida still shivering in his arms. As he looked on, Snotlout and the twins joined his side.

"Gods, this guy is unstoppable," Snotlout said, pale faced.

"Hold her," Fishlegs grunted as he thrust Merida at Snotlout forcing the young man to take the princess in his arms.

"Whoa, where are you going!?" Tuff questioned as Fishlegs stalked towards Jack.

"I'm going to go talk to him," Fishlegs replied, glancing back at the others as he pulled his warhammer out of its holster on his back, allowing them to see that his face had turned red and the veins in his neck had bulged outwards while his eyes had turned pure white.

"Oh crap," Ruff said wearily, "Fishlegs is pissed."

"So?" Tuff asked in confusion.

"Dude," Snotlout said as he turned to look at Tuff with an incredulous expression, "The last time he got pissed he jumped off his dragon and hit Mor'du in the face."

"Oh," Tuff replied with a look of understanding, "Right."

Jack was completely focused on Astrid as she continued to try and pick herself up off of the ground, gripping her arm in pain. His focus was so narrowed though that he didn't hear Fishlegs charging towards him until the young man was nearly on top of him.

"Hey!" Fishlegs shouted, catching Jack's attention just as the Viking threw all his strength into swinging his warhammer at the spirit. Jack only had the time to widen his eyes in surprise before the iron hammerhead slammed against his chest. Jack was lifted off of his feet as the very air seemed to shake around him and Fishlegs. As Fishlegs followed through with his swing, the blow sent Jack flying through the air, a cloud of snow exploding into the air in his wake. Jack soared across the clearing before slamming against a tree with enough force to send a crack straight through the trunk as branches and splinters went flying. For a moment, the air was still as Jack leaned against the tree. Then, a loud groan reverberated through the clearing as the top of the tree leaned to the side before it came

crashing to the ground with Jack in tow, a cloud of snow and dirt kicking up as the treetop slammed against the frozen earth.

Fishlegs stood in the middle of the clearing, looking at his handiwork with his white eyes as the others looked at him in shock. As he watched, Fishlegs saw Jack pulling himself out from the broken branches. Glaring, Fishlegs growled before he began stalking towards Jack, dragging his hammer along the ground behind him.

"Yeah, let's not piss Fishlegs off anytime soon," Tuff stated, pale faced, earning nods from Ruff and Snotlout. As they watched, the sound of a roar and swooping wings caught their attention before Toothless landed near the middle of the clearing, Hiccup quickly sliding off his back as he looked around.

"What's going on, guys!?" he called to them as he turned to look at the three other teens, "What hap-"

Hiccup froze as he saw Merida clutched in Snotlout's arms. His face going pale, Hiccup rushed over, sliding to a stop on his knees next to Snotlout so that he could get a better look at Merida, who was still shivering in his cousin's arms.

"What happened?" Hiccup questioned as he reached out and touched Merida's brow, "Gods, she's ice cold."

"I screwed up, cuz," Snotlout answered, his face falling, "That guyâ€¦he showed up out of nowhere and he was pissed. Merida tried talking him down but I was sure that he was going to hurt her. I thought I was doing the right thing butâ€¦I think I made everything worse."

Looking over his shoulder, Hiccup saw Jack dodge out of the way of another one of Fishlegs' swing before firing another blast of frigid air that the young man was forced to roll out of the way.

"We have to put a stop to this," Hiccup surmised before looking back at his cousin and the twins, "Where's Astrid?"

"She's not looking so good right now either," Ruff replied, indicating to Astrid, who had managed to pull herself back to her feet, still holding her injured arm.

"Okay," Hiccup said as he took off his cloak and wrapped it around Merida with Snotlout's help, "Snotlout, how you feeling about flying?"

"Uh, pretty good, I guess," Snotlout replied, looking at Hiccup in confusion, "Why?"

"I need you to take Toothless and get Merida back to the village," Hiccup replied as he looked at his cousin pleadingly, "I need you to get her to Gothi. Can you do that for me?"

"No problem, cuz," Snotlout replied with a determined nod, taking Merida back into his arms, "I'm your man. As long as your dragon doesn't throw me off."

"I don't think you have to worry about that," Hiccup replied as he turned and pat Toothless on the head, "Right pal?"

Toothless snorted in reply before nodding his head. Lifting Merida up, Snotlout climbed onto Toothless' back, doing his best to keep a tight grip on both the princess and the dragon. Once Snotlout was as secure as he could be, Toothless took off, disappearing in the direction of the village.

"What about us?" Tuff questioned.

"I need you two to take Astrid and get her back to the village," Hiccup replied, "You'll probably run into my dad and the villagers on their way here. I'm sure they'll help you get her back safe."

Tuff nodded as he ran over to Astrid's side, letting the young woman put her arm around his shoulders for support. Ruff hesitated for a moment as she looked at Hiccup.

"What about you?" she asked.

"I'm going to put an end to this," Hiccup answered as he drew Bemuhén out of its scabbard, "Now, get Astrid back to the village."

Ruff nodded before running over to help Astrid. Hiccup watched them as they left the clearing before turning his attention to Fishlegs and Jack. The two of them were standing a few feet apart, glaring at each other. Then, all at once, they charged one another, their weapons held at the ready but before the two of them could reach each other, Hiccup ran in between them.

"That's enough!" Hiccup shouted, pointing his sword at Jack as he held a hand up to Fishlegs, causing them both to skid to a halt "This has gone on long enough!"

"Yeah!? And who areâ€| " Jack began to say angrily, but his voice trailed off as his eyes fell on Hiccup's sword, "I know that sword."

"Huh?" Hiccup questioned in confusion, his attention focused on Jack.

"I know that sword," Jack repeated before turning his attention towards Hiccup, "Hilde had that sword in her cottage. Why do you have it? Did you steal that too!?"

"No!" Hiccup replied, pausing before continuing "She gave it to me, "

"Why would she do that?" Jack questioned, growing more confused and on edge.

"Becauseâ€|" Hiccup paused and sighed sadly, his sword still pointed at Jack, "Because she was my grandmother."

"What?" Jack asked, growing even more confused, "Your grandmother?"

"Well, more like my many times great grandmother," Hiccup explained, "Sheâ€|she was pretty old."

"Yeah," Jack agreed, lowering his guard slightly, "I guess she was

and I guess I can sort of see the resemblance."

"I can tell you're upset, it seems like you knew her pretty well," Hiccup continued, trying to keep Jack calm, "I know who you are too, Jack Frost."

"How do you know my name?" Jack asked in surprised confusion.

"Your friend North told me," Hiccup explained, "He's here looking for you."

"North's looking for me?" Jack asked, growing only more confused, "Why?"

"Something big has started happening, and it's looking like you're at the center of it," Hiccup went on, looking at Jack pleadingly, "We're on the same side here, Jack. How about we all calm down and talk this over."

As Hiccup talked, the weather slowly began to calm and the sky cleared up once more.

"Yeah," Jack stated as he completely dropped his guard, "Yeah, okay."

"Sounds good," Hiccup replied with a smile as he lowered his sword, "How about you, Fish? You're being awfully quiet back there."

"It probably has to do with the fact that your hand is on fire," Jack pointed out.

"What!?" Hiccup said in surprise before he spun around to face Fishlegs, finding his best friend, seeing a now calmer Fishlegs mesmerized by Hiccup's outstretched hand, which indeed was engulfed in red and yellow flames. Turning towards Fishlegs, Hiccup pulled his burning hand closer, an astonished look on his face. He saw that his glove had burned away, as had most of the sleeve of both his coat and tunic.

"I didn't say anything before because I wasn't sure if that was normal or not," Jack commented from behind Hiccup, "Judging by your reactions I'm guess it's not."

"Iâ€¦I don't even feel it," Hiccup stated as he flexed his hand, the flames dancing across his skin as he moved.

"Howâ€¦How do you get it to stop?" Fishlegs questioned.

"Iâ€¦I don't know if I can," Hiccup replied, a troubled expression on his face.

"Here," Jack said as he stepped around Hiccup, "Let me try something."

Reaching out with his own hand, Jack clasped Hiccup's burning one, a cloud of steam kicking up as the two met. As the steam dissipated, it revealed Hiccup's hand had returned to normal.

"Thanks," Hiccup said, earning a nod from Jack.

At that moment, Donner suddenly came charging out of the sky with North on his back. As Donner landed, North quickly slid off of the reindeer's back and began looking around wildly.

"Jack!" North cried as he looked around, "You have to be stoping, zese people are ourâ€|"

North trailed off as he saw Jack, Hiccup and Fishlegs standing a short distance away, all looking at the older man in surprise, the Viking and the godlings hands still clasped together.

"Oh," North said in surprise, "I am missing everyzing, aren't I?"

A/N: So, I know I tend to say this a lot but believe me when I say that this chapter was amazingly fun to write, which is probably why I got this chapter out so quickly. It was great to stretch my fight scene muscles again, especially with someone as powerful as Jack. Hope you guys liked it! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

6. Witching Hour

Chapter 6: Witching Hour

Atop one of the cliffs that flanked the natural bay the village of Berk sat in, a small hut sat, raised above the ground by stilts. A short flight of stairs led from the ground to a simple deck that surrounded the door to the house. Before the door stood the frail form of Gothi, looking up at the mountain that marked the center of the island, watching as the storm clouds that surrounded it slowly dissipated. As she watched, something caught her gaze, causing her to narrow her eyes to try and get a better look at the small dot she saw flying through the air. As she realized what it was, Gothi's eyes widened before she began making her way down the stairs as quickly as she could. A second later, Toothless landed at the foot of the stairs, allowing Snotlout to slide off with Merida clutched in his arms.

"What happened!?" Gothi exclaimed as she approached them.

"That guy you and Hiccup have been talking aboutâ€|that Jack Frost guyâ€|" Snotlout tried to explain, a worried expression on his face as he held Merida so that Gothi could see her, "He attacked herâ€|I don't know what he did."

Reaching out, Gothi placed her hand on Merida's brow before pulling it back with a gasp.

"She's ice cold," she said worriedly, before glancing at Toothless, who was nervously shuffling behind Snotlout, "Where's Hiccup? Why do you have his dragon?"

"He stayed behind to deal with Jack," Snotlout replied as he glanced back towards the mountain, "He told me to get Merida back to you as soon as possible."

"Well, we haven't a moment to spare," Gothi replied as she turned back to the hut and began making her way up the steps, "Come along,

and hurry!"

Snotlout quickly followed behind Gothi with Merida in his arms as she made her way into her hut, Toothless waiting outside. As he entered the hut, Snotlout took a moment to glance around the cramped space. The entire hut seemed to be cramped with all sorts of things, from simple pieces of furniture to shelves stuffed with books and scrolls and cabinets filled with all sorts of ingredients that Snotlout decided he did not wish to know the origins of. Snotlout was forced to duck as he walked through the hallway at the entrance to the hut in order to avoid the various talismans and fetishes that hung from the ceiling. As he walked, he noticed nearly a dozen tiny dragons had taken up residence in the hut, scurrying by underfoot and chirping up at Snotlout as he passed.

"Bring her in here, quickly!" Gothi bid, indicating to a side room occupied mostly by a bed. Doing as he was bid, Snotlout quickly brought the shivering Merida into the room and laid her down on the bed, still wrapped in Hiccup's cloak.

"Here, put these on the bed," Gothi instructed as she came into the room, holding a bundle of blankets.

"You want me to cover her up?" Snotlout questioned as he took the bundle.

"No, I need to get her out of those clothes first," Gothi explained as she moved past Snotlout, "If that frost on her chest melts, it will soak her to the bone and we'll be right back where we started."

"Oh," Snotlout replied as he set the blankets down at the foot of the bed.

"Now, be a dear and go fetch me some water," Gothi stated as she began unbundling Merida from the cloak, "There should be a bucket in the hall somewhere. I'll need it heated up too, so see if you can get the Night Fury or one of my Terrors to help you with that."

With a nod, Snotlout turned and rushed out of the room, grabbing a bucket sitting on the floor as he made his way to the door. As he left, Gothi quickly began to undress Merida, fretting as she saw the princess' clothes had already started to soak through.

"I know I've never been one to pray to you," Gothi whispered to herself as she undressed Merida before covering the shivering girl with the blankets, "But I believe we're going to need a little fire to counteract this cold, Lord Loki."

As Gothi spoke, she moved over to a nearby fireplace and began to make a fire. As she tried to light a spark, the pile of wood she had made suddenly caught fire in a whoosh of air and heat, causing Gothi to jump back in surprise.

"I will take that as a good sign," Gothi observed with a small smile before she went to work getting the rest of her preparations done.

Meanwhile,

There was a moment of silence in the clearing outside Hilde's hut as Jack, Hiccup and Fishlegs all looked at North in surprise.

"North?" Jack questioned, quirking his eyebrow at the older man, "What are you doing here?"

"I am looking for you, my friend," North answered.

"Looking for me?" Jack questioned in confusion, "Why?"

"Eet ees being long story," North replied as he looked around the clearing, noticing the broken tree and other signs of battle, "Vhat was happening here?"

"I had some disagreements with the locals," Jack answered, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Disagreements!?" Fishlegs shouted, quickly growing angry again, "Is that what you call trying to kill me and my friends!?"

Fishlegs began to move towards Jack but was stopped as Hiccup lifted his burnt hand up in front of the larger boy, causing the blonde to flinch backwards as he looked at his best friend's hand wearily.

"Vhat deed you do, Jack?" North questioned, narrowing his eyes at Jack, who's own gaze fell under the weight of the Rus' glare.

"Look, I found out some bad news and I may have jumped to some conclusions," Jack admitted, "And then I may have overreacted."

"That's putting it lightly," Fishlegs stated with a snort of contempt.

"I am taking eet zat someone got hurt?" North questioned, glancing over at Fishlegs.

"He roughed up Snotlout and the twins pretty good and I'm pretty sure Astrid has a broken arm," Fishlegs continued before glaring at Jack again, "That's nothing compared to what he did to Merida."

"Jack," North said with an angry tone as he turned his attention to the spirit again.

"Look, I just threw a little cold at her, I didn't freeze her solid or anything," Jack replied defensively, "Besides, she's the one who shot an arrow at me!"

"_YÃ³b tvoyÃ° mat,_" North mumbled to himself as he pinched the bridge of his nose, "I stirred up enough trouble when I came here. Vhen ze chief finds outâ€¦"

"Oh, don't worry," Stoick's voice came from the edge of the clearing, where he stood surrounded by a large number of Viking warriors, "I'm already aware."

"_PizdÃ©ts_, " North muttered as he turned to look at Stoick with wide eyes.

Stoick was on Jack before anyone could react, moving faster than anyone with his bulk had a right to move, grabbing the spirit by the neck and lifting him off his feet, his massive hand almost encompassing the godling's head.

"As you may have guessed, I'm the chief on this island," Stoick growled, his face inches from Jack's as the spirit struggled to escape from his grasp, "That means I don't take kindly to people coming on my island and hurting my people, like perhaps, breaking a teenage girl's arm in two."

Jack hissed in pain as Stoick squeezed harder on his head.

"And when that same person tried to freeze the heart of my future daughter-in-law well," Stoick growled as he squeezed even harder on Jack's skull, "That's when I start taking things personally."

"Dad, that's enough!" Hiccup shouted as he took a step towards his father.

"We can't allow someone to hurt our people and get away with it, son," Stoick replied, not letting go of Jack, who continued to struggle against the Viking chief's grip, "That's something you'll have to understand for when you're chief one day."

"I do understand that, Dad," Hiccup continued, "But you can't do this. We need him, regardless of what he's done to us."

Stoick hesitated for a moment as he looked over at Hiccup, not letting go of Jack even as his hand began to go numb from cold.

"You have to trust me," Hiccup pleaded, looking his father dead in the eye.

Stoick hesitated for a second moment, before giving a reluctant grunt and dropping Jack to the ground.

"You're lucky my son has a softer heart than me," Stoick said as he looked down at Jack.

"You're lucky you didn't hold on for a little while longer or you would have gotten a nasty case of frostbite," Jack managed to cough out in reply as he picked himself back up to his feet. Stoick merely snorted in reply before turning his attention back to Hiccup.

"Are you alright, son?" Stoick questioned as he approached Hiccup.

"Been better but okay," Hiccup reassured his father with a shrug. As he did, Stoick's eyes fell on Hiccup's burnt arm.

"What happened to your arm?" Stoick questioned, drawing North's attention to it as well.

"Nothing, I'm fine," Hiccup answered, rubbing his exposed arm self-consciously, "Just had a bit of an accident."

"Bit of an accident, huh?" Stoick questioned, clearly not believing that that was the whole story but unwilling to push the issue any further, before he glanced back at Jack, "So, what is it you want us

to do with this one?"

"I'm not sure yet," Hiccup answered with a shrug, glancing over at Jack as he spoke, "I was hoping to talk to him to get a better idea of what's going on."

"Alright, just be careful, Hiccup," Stoick stated with a sigh before his expression turned stern, "I tell you one thing now though. He is not staying in a guest house."

"Fair enough, Dad," Hiccup agreed with a nod. Giving a satisfied nod of his own, Stoick turned and walked back to the group of Vikings who were waiting at the edge of the clearing.

"Alright everyone, it looks like my son has everything under control here," Stoick announced, "We will head back to the village for now."

There was a rumble of acceptance from the crowd as well as a few grumbles of disappointment as the Viking warriors began making their way back into the forest and headed in the direction of the village.

As the crowd began to move out, Stoick stepped forward and place his hand onto the shoulder of another man as he walked by. The man was tall and lanky with long, blonde hair and blue eyes. He wore a forest green cloak along with a long, brown fur coat, brown breeches, brown, leather boots and brown, fur gloves. A bow and quiver were slung around his shoulders beneath his cloak.

"Tuff," Stoick said as the man stopped to look at him, "I need you to hang around and keep an eye on things here. Let us know if anything happens."

"Will do," Tuff replied before pulling his hood up and slipping away into the forest. Stoick took one last moment to look back at his son before heading back towards the village with the rest of the crowd.

"So, are you going to be telling me what really happened to your arm?" North questioned as he walked up next to Hiccup.

"It caught on fire," Jack pointed out, earning a quick glare from Hiccup.

"I am zeenking eet ees time I am having a closer look at your arm," North stated before holding his hand out to Hiccup. Hiccup sighed before reluctantly holding his arm out to North, rolling the remains of his sleeve up as he did. North took the next few minutes to carefully look over the burn that spiraled its way up and down Hiccup's right arm. When he was done, North stepped back, nodding his head as he stroked his beard pensively.

"Ze speereet of fire vas mentioning he had touched you when he beed me to come here," North stated, "I vas not knowing what he meant until now."

"Gothi said it was a blessing when I first showed her it," Hiccup explained as he looked down at his arm, flexing his hand as he did.

"She was being right," North agreed with a nod, "I am being sure you are seeing zat now."

"So, what? Loki gave me the power to light my right arm on fire?" Hiccup questioned with a dubious expression.

"I am believing eet to be much more zan zat," North replied with a chuckle, "You veell be needing to practice to figure out vhat you can really do."

"Practice?" Hiccup repeated with a doubtful tone, "I don't even know how to turn it on and off."

"I veell be helping you figure zat out as vell," North stated with a sagely nod before he glanced over at Jack, "I am being sure Jack can help you as well."

Hiccup looked uncertain before he glanced over at Jack as well, the spirit standing a short distance away, watching the exchange.

"You haven't told me yet how you knew Hilde," Hiccup pointed out as he rolled what remained of his sleeve back down his arm, which was starting to turn white against the cold air.

"I like to travel," Jack replied with a shrug, "I guess it kind of comes with controlling the winds and such. A couple of years back, I ended up wandering here. I still don't know if it was by chance that I ended up here or if Hilde somehow led me here but I ended up following a bunch of wisps right to her house."

"Knowing her, it was probably by her design," Fishlegs commented as he crossed his arms over his chest. Jack chuckled at the comment before his expression fell as he noticed Fishlegs glaring at him.

"Anyway," Jack continued with an awkward cough, "The time that I met her was kind of a tough one for me, and she ended up being exactly the person I needed to know at that time. She helped me figure some things out about myself and picked me up from that bad time. I've visited her every now and again since then."

"Why vere you never telling me about her?" North questioned.

"Because she needed to stay secret," Jack explained, "When I first met her, she told me why she was out here. She told me she was hiding and who she was hiding from."

"Mor'du," Hiccup supplied, his face turning grim, "The Demon Bear. Her son."

"So, she told you too, huh?" Jack questioned.

"It was more piecing together a puzzle for us," Fishlegs replied.

"So, what exactly happened?" Jack inquired, glancing between Hiccup and Fishlegs.

"Mor'du was able to find her," Hiccup answered, "I'm still not sure if it was something that we did or if he figured it out on his own but he found her either way."

"What happened then?" Jack pressed.

"Well, I'm sure you must know why Hilde was hiding from Mor'du," Hiccup stated.

"The Red Death," Jack replied with shock, "He didn't release it did he?"

"He did," Hiccup replied with a nod, "At the cost of her life."

"Wait, the Red Death has been released!?" Jack questioned in horror, struggling to put his thoughts into words, "If the Red Death was released then howâ€¦I don'tâ€¦how are youâ€¦"

"We killed him," Hiccup explained plainly.

"You killed the Red Death!?" Jack asked in shock, spinning towards North as the Rus chuckled at his reaction, "Did you know about this!?"

"Of course, Jack," North answered with a smile, "I am knowing many zeengs, after all."

"What about Mor'du?" Jack questioned, turning back to Hiccup and Fishlegs, "Did you all kill him too?"

"No," Fishlegs replied with a shake of his head, smirking as he saw Jack relax slightly.

"I killed him myself," Hiccup explained evenly, earning a shocked look from Jack, "Now, if you all wouldn't mind, if we're going to continue this conversation, I'd like to do it inside where it's warm."

As Hiccup and North began making their way into Hilde's cottage, Jack paused as he turned to address Fishlegs as the Viking teen walked by.

"Did he really kill Mor'du single handedly?" Jack questioned.

"Yep," Fishlegs replied curtly as he walked towards the cottage, Jack following behind.

"How?" Jack pressed.

"Hiccup shot him in his good eye," Fishlegs explained.

"That's all?" Jack questioned, surprised Mor'du could be brought down so easily.

"He did it with an exploding arrow that he invented," Fishlegs replied, glancing at Jack before miming an explosion from his eye, making Jack stop in his tracks from surprise.

"Oh," Jack said, his voice barely above a whisper, his face paler

than usual as he followed Fishlegs into the cottage.

"I am seeing she enjoyed voodcarving," North noted as he looked around the cottage while Hiccup tried to light another fire in the firepit.

"Yeah, she did it a lot," Jack stated as he shut the door behind him, "She said it soothed her."

"I am guessing she needed ze soothing," North continued as he picked up a woodcarving depicting a roaring dragon, "She vas being your ancestor, _da, _Hiccup? Married twice, once to the great Siegfried and onceâ€|"

"To the Red Death," Hiccup finished as he managed to light a fire, casting dancing shadows across the cottage.

"Hilde never talked must about her husband, this Siegfried guy," Jack commented as he took a seat on one of the chairs, perching on the edge of the seat in a curled up position instead of actually sitting, "Who was he?"

"Seigfried the Great," Fishlegs intoned, "Uniter of the clans and dragonslayer extraordinaire. Jarl of the Norselands, Defender of the North, Chief of Chiefs and King of the Wilderwest."

"Well, that sounds important," Jack commented before turning his attention back to Hiccup, "So, why aren't you set up in some big fancy castle or something?"

"The Red Death saw an end to that," Hiccup explained, "He spent generations licking his wounds after Siegfried defeated him before coming back. He killed Siegfried's grandson and scattered the tribes once more. He would have done worse if Hilde hadn't managed to seal him away."

"Their stories seem so intertwined," Jack commented, "She said that the Red Death came back as much for her as for revenge. She said that he was obsessed with her."

Jack paused as a pensive look crossed his face.

"You know, now that I think of it, she never told me how she ended up with the Red Death in the first place," Jack commented as he looked over at the others while Hiccup and Fishlegs shared a look.

"She never told us either," Hiccup stated.

"I am theenking I am knowing vhy," North said quietly from the other side of the room. Looking over at North, the others saw him staring at a woodcarving that he clutched in his hands, his face white as a sheet. Hiccup quickly walked over to North's side as the large man dropped the woodcarving to the floor with a clatter as he stumbled back and caught himself on Hilde's workbench.

"What's wrong, North?" Hiccup questioned with concern as he scooped down and picked up the woodcarving, "What did you see?"

"Something out of a nightmare," North replied as he tried to recollect himself.

Hiccup turned the woodcarving over to look at it before looking up at North with a confused expression.

"This is a house with chicken legs," Hiccup stated as he turned the carving over to show North.

"_Da,_" North agreed with a nod of his head.

"I don't get it," Hiccup replied, turning the carving over again and looking at it with a confused expression, "Why is this so scary?"

"Eet ees not being scary for vhat eet ees," North answered as he walked over to one of the wicker chairs with a thud, "Eet ees being scary for vhat eet ees representing."

"And what exactly is it representing?" Fishlegs questioned as he walked up next to Hiccup to get a look at the woodcarving for himself.

"Baba Yaga," North answered, his voice barely above a whisper as if he were afraid to speak the words aloud.

"What is a Baba Yaga?" Hiccup questioned.

"Baba Yaga ees not being a vhat," North replied grimly, "Baba Yaga ees being a who, and who she ees being ees one of ze most dangerous vitches who has ever been living. Zat house ees being her home, an unnatural monstrosity zat used to stalk ze vild vastes of my homeland."

"Thatâ€¦doesn't sound good," Hiccup replied, before looking back at the carving, "Why does Hilde have a carving of her house?"

"As I'm sure you have been figuring out, zis Hilde vas like me," North explained.

"A magi," Hiccup replied with a nod.

"And like me, she needed someone to be teaching her how to be using her gift," North continued, "I have been telling you about my old master, Ombric Shalazar. I am suspecting I am knowing who vas being ze one to be teaching Hilde."

"Are you sayingâ€¦are you saying this Baba Yaga person was the one who taught Hilde magic?" Jack questioned, shocked.

"_Da,_" North answered with a small nod, "Zere are facts zat are adding up to zees. As Hiccup vas saying, vhy vould Hilde be carving something like zat if she vas not being familiar with it? Then, it is telling me vhy Hilde vas ever being een ze Red Death's clutches."

"How so?" Fishlegs questioned.

"One ees not becoming ze most feared magi to ever leeve vithout meeting some specific people," North answered as he looked Hiccup in the eye.

"Pitch Black," Hiccup replied in shock as Jack's eyes went wide in surprise.

"Wait, what?" Fishlegs questioned, clearly confused, "Pitch who?"

"Baba Yaga was being one of ze shadow's greatest servants," North explained, ignoring Fishlegs' growing confusion, "It was being she who led his forces ze last time he was trying to escape five hundred years ago."

"What does this have to do with the Red Death?" Fishlegs asked, trying to keep up with the conversation.

"After she was failing to get ze shadow released, Baba Yaga must have begun planning for her next opportunity," North explained, "What better ally to be having zen one of ze most powerful dragons to ever be leeving?"

"So, she sent her apprentice to try and recruit him," Jack surmised with a nod of his head, "Judging by what history tells us, I'm guessing it didn't go like she was hoping it would."

"It would be appearing not," North agreed with a nod of his head.

"She's still out there though, isn't she?" Hiccup questioned on edge, "If Baba Yaga's on the shadow's side that means she'll be rearing what I'm sure is her ugly head at one point or another."

"_Net_," North replied with a shake of his head, "You veell not need to be vorrying about her."

"Why not?" Hiccup asked in confusion.

"Because she ees being dead," North replied grimly.

"Didâ€¦|" Fishlegs paused, unsure he wanted to say what he was thinking, "Did you kill her?"

"_Net_," North answered with another shake of his head, "I was wanting to, but by ze time I was finding her, someone else had beaten me to it."

"Why did you want to kill her?" Hiccup questioned.

"Remember how I was telling you how my old master was being dead?" North questioned, earning a nod from Hiccup, "Now you are knowing ze reason why."

A quiet fell over the cottage as the others digested what North had said.

"What happened when you found her?" Jack questioned, breaking the silence.

"I had been managing to track her to ze coldest and most desolate part of ze Frozen Steppes," North explained, his eyes glassing over as he lost himself in his memory, "It was being zere zat I was finding her house. Or what was being left of eet. All eet was being

was a pair of chicken legs standing over a pile of ashes and a burnt corpse."

"Do you have any idea who could have done it?" Fishlegs questioned.

"For ze longest time, I vas having no idea," North answered, a grim look on his face, "But now, now I am starting to get idea."

"Why's that?" Hiccup asked.

"When I vas hunting Baba Yaga, I vas hearing stories about her apprentice," North replied as he began stroking his beard again, "Eet vas said she was finding her apprentice living on a small farm, drawn to a power zat rivaled her own."

"I guess that explains how Baba Yaga found Hilde," Jack replied with a nod, "But what does this have to do with the witch's death? You don't think Hilde did it, do you?"

"_Net_," North answered with another shake of his head, "But eet deed get me to be zeenking about somezing zose stories said."

"What's that?" Fishlegs asked.

"Zey are saying zat ze reason ze source zat Baba Yaga followed vas being so powerful vas being because zere vere two sources living close together," North explained as he focused on Hiccup, who looked shocked.

"Are you sayingâ€¦|" Hiccup began to say before trailing off.

"I am zeenking zat Hilde had a sister," North answered with a measured nod, "I am zeenking she vas ze one who killed Baba Yaga and I am zeenking she ees ze one ve should be vorrying about."

A/N: Not as much action in this one but I think it turned out pretty good. Hope you guys liked it! As always feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

7. Heart of the Matter

****Chapter 7: The Heart of the Matter****

"So, I think I need to be brought up to speed on a few things here," Jack commented from his seat in Hilde's cottage, "Because I'm starting to feel a little lost."

"Me as well," Fishlegs agreed, "Though from the sounds of it, I don't think I'm going to like what I'm going to hear."

"You're not," Hiccup answered with a sigh, "The short version is that the living personification of darkness and fear, who was locked away millennia ago by the other great spirits, is going to be making his bi-millennial escape attempt soon and Loki, the spirit of fire, wants me to help stop it. And for whatever reason, Jack here is at the middle of it."

"I am?" Jack questioned, quirking an eyebrow in confusion.

"_Da,_" North agreed, nodding his head as he crossed his arms, "You have been seence ze moment you vere being born."

"Since I was born?" Jack parroted back, standing up as he looked at North suspiciously, "You know something about this, don't you?"

"I am knowing enough," North replied, "Vhy are you zeenking I have been following you around your whole life?"

"What aren't you telling me, North?" Jack demanded, taking a step towards the larger man, the air in the room noticeably cooling as the spirit became more agitated.

"Nozing," North insisted.

"Don't lie to me, North!" Jack snapped, causing a blast of cold air to ripple through the cottage, nearly gutting the fire under the cauldron, "I've been asking you about where I came from my whole life! You don't get to clam up now that I'm finally getting some answers out of you!"

"Zere are no answers to be getting, Jack!" North argued, "I am only knowing vhat I am being told, and I am not being told much. Just because I vas being zere when you vere being born is not meaning I am knowing vhy. I am being een just as much dark as you are."

"Then why don't you ask them?" Jack questioned, "Ask Loki, or Soliel, or whoever. Ask them where I come from and what I'm doing here!"

"Eet ees not vorking like zat, Jack," North replied, doing his best to keep Jack calm.

"Why not!?" Jack shouted, creating another blast of icy wind that forced Hiccup and Fishlegs back half a step as the floor underneath the spirit's feet was covered in frost.

"Because eet ees not, Jack," North answered with a sad look on his face, "Please be believing me, I vould be doing so eef I could, but ze spirits are not being beholden to me. I can be talking to ze fire, or ze sun or ze moon all day and night but zere ees being no vay for me to make zem talk back."

This seemed to relax Jack, who's shoulder's slumped in disappointment. He took a few steps back before sitting down in his chair in a defeated heap.

"Some family I've got," Jack mused, "Leave me out here without any reason why. Don't even have the decency to say hi."

Jack turned his head and looked up at Hiccup.

"Don't suppose Loki told you anything more about me, huh?" Jack questioned.

"No, I'm sorry," Hiccup answered with a shake of his head, "He only told me that you were important to whatever the shadow is planning."

"Figures," Jack mumbled as he turned his gaze to observe his feet.

"Is there anything else useful that Loki told you?" Fishlegs questioned.

"I remember he said something about how the light and dark were planning against each other," Hiccup recalled, "He made it sound like he was a third party in all of this."

"Sounds like Soliel might have a horse in this race then," Jack chimed in, "Sounds like whoever that is is pretty important."

"Do you know anything about this, North?" Hiccup questioned.

"I am not," North answered with a shake of his head, "Soliel ees not being a very chatty spirit. Not to me at least. Should not be too hard to figure zees out though."

"Speaking of plans, what's yours?" Jack questioned, turning his attention back to Hiccup.

"Huh?" Hiccup questioned in confusion.

"It seems like it was a big deal that you come and find me," Jack explained, "Now that you've found me, what do you plan to do?"

"I'm not sure, actually," Hiccup admitted with an awkward shrug, "I think the whole idea was to keep you safe from Pitch, so I guess we have to bunker down now while we figure things out."

"Good luck with that," Jack replied with a snort.

"Excuse me?" Hiccup questioned, looking at Jack in confusion.

"Listen, Sneezy," Jack began to say.

"It's Hiccup," the young man corrected, looking annoyed.

"Whatever," Jack replied before continuing, "If you hadn't figured it out by now, I'm not a big fan of sticking around in one place for too long. As much as I appreciate the help, I don't think I'll be staying that long, even if your quaint little village is improved by all the dragons."

"You say that like you've been in the village before," Fishlegs observed.

"Well, of course I have," Jack replied with a chuckle, "You don't think I'd visit here so often and not check it out, do you?"

"I'm pretty sure someone would have noticed you," Fishlegs argued.

"I don't think so," Jack replied with a grin before he suddenly disappeared, causing Hiccup and Fishlegs to jump in surprise.

"Yes, just one of my many tricks," Jack said, his voice floating ethereally through the air, making it impossible for them to figure

out where he was, "Makes it pretty easy for me to get from place to place without people being any the wiser. So, trust me, I've see just about everything your village has to offer."

"Hel, I even saw that flying trip you took with that lady friend of yours," Jack continued as he reappeared crouched on the workbench right next to Hiccup, causing the young man to start in surprise, "You still haven't thanked me for saving your ass, by the way."

"That was you?" Hiccup questioned as he recollected himself.

"Well, it wasn't Thor," Jack replied with a chuckle, "Tell you what though, I do feel like sticking around for a little while longer. Maybe we can figure some out some more about this whole shadow thing."

"Fair enough," Hiccup agreed with a nod.

"We should probably be getting back to the village then," Fishlegs stated.

"_Da_," North agreed as he stood up, "After all zees excitement, I could be using a stiff drink."

"I'll put out the fire," Hiccup said as Fishlegs and North made their way out of Hilde's cottage. As Jack moved past him however, Hiccup suddenly lashed out, grabbing the spirit by the front of his tunic before pushing him against one of the walls with a soft bang.

"Hey, what the Hel!?" Jack questioned angrily.

"Shut up," Hiccup snapped, a cold rage on his face, "I'm playing nice with you because apparently doing so will save a lot of people. People I care about. And seeing as you saved me the other day, I'm willing to think you're a decent guy. But let's get one thing straight. I won't tolerate anything you did today again. Threaten my friends or so much as touch Merida again and I promise you, I will stop being nice."

As Hiccup spoke, the fire beneath the cauldron suddenly flared up, reaching upwards as if trying to consume the black iron pot above it, drawing Jack's eye to it.

"Understand?" Hiccup questioned, bringing Jack's attention back to him.

"Yeah, Belch," Jack replied, reaching up and carefully peeling Hiccup's hand off of his tunic, "I think I understand just fine."

"It's Hiccup," the young man corrected as he took a step away from Jack.

"Mhm," Jack answered dismissively as he looked over at the hotly burning fire, "So much for putting that fire out."

"Didâ€¦Did I do that?" Hiccup questioned, looking between the fire and his burnt hand.

"Probably, yeah," Jack replied with a nod, "I'm guessing whatever blessing Loki gave you works similar to my powers. If that's true, then they're tightly tied to your emotional state."

"So the angrier I getâ€¦" Hiccup began to say, looking at his burnt hand as he flexed it.

"The hotter things will get," Jack finished as he rested his crook on his shoulder, "Who knows, if you get angry enough you might be able to start fires all by yourself."

The thought seemed to scare Hiccup, his eyes going wide as he looked at his hand.

"Relax, pal, despite your little outburst just now, you don't strike me as the hot headed type," Jack said with a chuckle, "You just have to learn how to control it."

"How do I do that?" Hiccup questioned before looking to Jack, "Can you show me?"

"That seems like a real inviting deal after you just threatened me," Jack observed with a smirk before an awkward look crossed his face, "Besides, I don't have the best track record with this sort of thing."

"What do you mean by that?" Hiccup questioned, "Have you met someone with a blessing like mine before?"

"Forget it," Jack snapped defensively before turning away from Hiccup and heading towards the door, "Just trust me when I tell you that you're better off finding someone else to teach you this stuff."

"There is no one else," Hiccup replied as he reached out and grabbed Jack's sleeve, stopping the spirit and bringing his attention back to the young man, who looked at the godling with pleading eyes, "Please. I need your help."

Jack looked down at the shorter Hiccup for a moment before sighing dramatically.

"Alright, fine," Jack relented, "I'll see what I can do. Guess it will help to clean up my image around here."

"Thank you," Hiccup replied as he released his hold on Jack's sleeve and took a step back.

"Don't mention it," Jack said dismissively before he glanced over at the hotly burning fire, "We should probably be doing something about that first of all."

"Have any suggestions?" Hiccup questioned as he turned to face the fire.

"Well, since getting angry is what started the fire, you should probably try the opposite," Jack replied with a shrug.

"Wow, you're just a font of helpful information, aren't you?" Hiccup questioned sarcastically.

"I'm serious though," Jack answered, "Think of something that calms you. Something that makes you happy. Think of something you love. Or someone. That little redhead you were in such a tizzy over. Yeah, that's a good one, think of her."

At Jack's request, Hiccup closed his eyes and began to think about Merida. Quickly the image of Merida's face, smiling and giggling formed in his head, bringing a smile to Hiccup's face.

"It might help if you used the hand too," Jack spoke up suddenly as he leaned in inches away from Hiccup's face, snapping the young man out of his thoughts, "Also, try not to get too into thinking about her. I am standing right here after all."

Hiccup's only response was to glare at Jack, who quickly held up his hands and backed away from the Viking. Sighing in frustration, Hiccup closed his eyes again while holding his burnt hand out towards the fire. As Hiccup fell back into his thoughts, Jack watched as the fire began to calm, shrinking slowly at first before quickly dying as Hiccup clenched his hand into a fist, covering the cottage in shadow once more.

"And that is lesson number one," Jack said with a laugh as he pat Hiccup on the shoulder before turning and heading towards the door, "Now come on, Sniffles. Our friends are waiting for us."

"It's Hiccup," the young man mumbled half-heartedly as he looked at his hand with a small smile on his face.

"Yep," Jack replied disinterestedly as he opened the door, prompting Hiccup to walk over to him and exit as well.

"And zat ees how ze reindeer ees flying," they heard North say as they found him talking with Fishlegs with Donner standing at his side, "You are understanding now, _da_?"

"Not a bit," Fishlegs replied with a shake of his head as he made an uncomfortable face, "This is why I don't like magic. I don't think I'll ever understand it."

"Do not be worrying," North stated with a reassuring tone as he pat Fishlegs on the shoulder, "Eet ees not being for everyone."

"There you guys are," Fishlegs said as he turned to look at Hiccup and Jack, "What happened? Did you guys get lost?"

"Nah," Jack replied dismissively as he looped his arm around Hiccup's shoulders and pulled the Viking into a one-armed hug, shooting a large grin at Fishlegs, "I was just having a nice chat with Gag here."

"Hiccup," the young man corrected automatically.

"Whatever," Jack said in return.

"Well, if you two are through being buddy buddy, we should probably be getting back to the village," Fishlegs stated, indicating in the direction of the village with his head, "I want to check up on Astrid and I'm sure Hiccup wants to see how Merida is doing. They're going

to be thrilled when they see we've brought our new friend here along."

"Oh boy," Jack said with a sigh as the four of them began making their way into the woods, "Can't wait."

Later,

Gothi stood in her kitchen, mixing a few ingredients into a bowl. As she worked, she heard the sound of a few people entering her hut and making their way down the hall towards her.

"I was wondering when you were going to come see me," Gothi stated with a small smile as she turned around, "I'm sure you're worried sick about her."

Gothi paused as she caught sight of the three young men standing behind her, her eyes going wide as she looked at them. Specifically, she looked at Jack in shock, the spirit accompanying Hiccup and Fishlegs into her home.

There was an awkward pause as Gothi continued to openly stare at Jack.

"You know, I still think it really would have been better if I had waited outside," Jack whispered to Hiccup, not taking his eyes off of Gothi as she continued to stare at him.

"Relax, it will be fine," Hiccup replied before turning his attention back to Gothi, "Gothi, I-"

Before Hiccup could say anything more, Gothi reached up and grabbed the front of his jacket before forcefully pulling him down so that he was level with her.

"You and I must speak," Gothi stated, looking directly into Hiccup's eyes before leaning to the side so she could see Jack and Fishlegs, "Excuse us for a moment would you? Fishlegs, be a dear and bring this mixture into the other room. Helga is in there with Astrid and Merida, she'll know what to do with it."

"Of course, Elder," Fishlegs replied with a nod, reaching down and taking the offered bowl from Gothi before the elder turned away and practically dragged Hiccup out of the room. As the two of them left, Fishlegs turned and exited the room the way he had come in, leaving Jack by himself.

"I'll just wait here then," Jack said with a sigh as he sat down in an old wooden chair. As he did, he noticed a Terrible Terror wander over and start sniffing around his feet. Glancing around the room, Jack could see a handful of others scattered here and there.

"And I thought too many cats was a bad thing," Jack mused as he turned his attention towards the Terror that was scurrying around his feet, "Well, at least you guys make good company."

Jack reached down to pet the Terror on the back. As he was about to touch the dragon, the Terror suddenly spun around and latched its jaws onto Jack's fingers. There was a quiet pause as Jack and the dragon looked at one another before Jack let out a small squeak of

pain and stood up from the chair, shaking his hand to try and get the dragon off, but the Terror's jaws held firm as the spirit flailed its arm about, oblivious to the other Terror's moving towards him.

Meanwhile, in the other room, Gothi had finally released Hiccup as she turned to address the young man.

"What's all this about, Gothi?" Hiccup questioned as he looked at the elder in confusion.

"What all this is about is that not only did you bring a powerful and dangerous spirit into the village, you brought him into my house!" Gothi snapped at Hiccup, though she was doing her best to keep her voice below a whisper as she shot glances back towards her kitchen.

"It's alright, Gothi, trust me," Hiccup reassured her with a small smile, "I talked to him and explained everything. He's alright now."

"How can you be so sure?" Gothi questioned with a raised eyebrow, "You saw what he did to your friends. To the princess."

"Trust me," Hiccup replied a little more darkly, "We came to an understanding about all of that."

Gothi nodded slowly before smiling up at Hiccup.

"You put your trust in the oddest sorts, Hiccup," Hilde stated before reaching up and patting Hiccup on the arm, "But I put my trust in you."

"Thank you, Gothi," Hiccup replied with a smile of his own.

"Come along now," Gothi stated as she began walking around Hiccup towards the door, "I have to go check on the princess."

With a nod, Hiccup began to follow Gothi out of the room.

"Now, if what I inferred from your tone is correct, you have to be careful, Hiccup," Gothi said as they made their way out of the room, "For whatever else he might be, this Jack Frost is a great spirit, and that should grant him a healthy amount of respect."

As the two of them walked into Gothi's kitchen, a loud crash caught their attention. Looking towards the source, they found Jack standing in the middle of the kitchen, one foot in the air with a Terror dangling from it, its jaws latched onto his leg. Another hung from the fingers of one of his hands while another had latched onto his other arm. A fourth dragon sat on his head, doing its best to gnaw through his skull. Jack froze as he saw Gothi and Hiccup staring at him with wide eyes.

"Oh, oh good, you're back," he said with an embarrassed laugh, hopping on one foot to turn and face them, "I have to say, you're dragons are pretty rambunctious."

"Gothi!" Fishlegs called as he ran into the room, sparing Jack a confused glance before looking back towards the elder, "Merida's

awake!"

With that, Fishlegs turned and rushed back out of the room, Hiccup and Gothi quickly following behind, leaving Jack alone in the kitchen again.

"No, no, you go on ahead," Jack muttered to himself as he began trying to peel the Terrors off of him, "I'll be fine."

Entering the room behind Fishlegs, Hiccup found Merida laying in a bed that occupied most of the room, dressed in a long, white tunic. Astrid, her arm in a sling, was standing by her bedside, alongside another girl sitting in a chair. The girl was a few years younger than the rest of them, with brown hair done in twin braids that framed her freckled face, dressed in a simple brown dress with a black, hooded robe.

"She's just waking up," the girl said to Hiccup as he walked over to the bed and stood over Merida, watching as she slowly stirred awake. After a few moments her eyes fluttered open and focused on Hiccup standing over her.

"Hic?" she questioned hoarsely before coughing.

"Her throat is parched," the girl said as she handed a wooden bowl to Hiccup filled with a murky liquid, "Here, have her drink this."

"Thank you, Helga," Hiccup stated as he took the bowl and held it up to Merida's lips, the princess taking a few sips as she pushed herself up in the bed, making a face at the taste.

"It should warm you up a bit too," Helga said as she took the bowl back from Hiccup, "You're probably going to have a cold for a few days, but that's really the worst of it."

"Whit happened?" Merida asked, her words slurred by her stuffy nose.

"After I arrived at the fight, I had Snotlout bring you back here for Gothi to take care of you," Hiccup explained before turning his attention towards Gothi, "Where is he anyway?"

"I've been having him fetch and heat up water with your dragon," Gothi explained, "He should be back soon."

"Astrid," Merida said with a sniff as she looked at the blonde, "Yer arm."

"I've had worse," Astrid replied with a shrug, "I'll be fine."

"Whit happened teâ€|" Merida began to say as she turned back to Hiccup only to gasp in shock as she looked past Hiccup with wide eyes. Following her gaze, everyone turned to see Jack standing in the doorway. As everyone looked at him, Jack looked back in surprise and confusion.

"What?" Jack questioned, reaching up to touch his face, "Is there something on my-"

Before Jack could finish, a wooden bowl came whizzing through the air and hit him square on the nose, the liquids it held spilling around him. Jack let out a yelp of pain as he fell to one knee, clutching his face.

Hiccup had a shocked look on his face as he turned back around to look at Merida, who still had her arm outstretched in a throwing position, a look of fury on her face. As she threw the blankets off of her and moved to get up, Hiccup reached out and grabbed her by the shoulders before pushing her back into the bed.

"Hic, whit are ye daein'!?" Merida demanded as she glared at her betrothed.

"Wait Mer, just listen to me for a second," Hiccup said, "You can't justâ€¦"

"No, no, it's okay," Jack interrupted as he stood up, still pinching his nose in pain, "I deserved that."

As Jack looked back towards them, a glass jar suddenly came flying at him and broke against his head.

"Alright, can we remove small, throwable objects from her reach please?" Jack questioned as he clutched the side of his head.

"Merida, stop!" Hiccup said as he reached out and grabbed her arm just as the princess was about to throw another jar at Jack, forcing her to drop it.

"Hiccup, whit th' Hel is gaein' on!?" Merida growled as she continued to glare at the young man as she wrenched her arm from his grasp.

"Look, I talked to him and we figured out this was a big misunderstanding," Hiccup explained, "He was just as upset about Hilde's death as we were and he overreacted."

"Overreacted!?" Merida asked incredulously, "Hiccup, he tried tae kill me! Why did ye bring him here!?"

"Because we need him, Merida!" Hiccup argued, "He's the key to all of this, everything that Loki and North have been telling us!"

"If he's th' key tae everythin', then why daennae we jist kill him!?" Merida questioned, "'At way, th' shadow can ne'er get his hands on him."

"No, Merida," Hiccup replied, a shocked look on his face, "We're better than that. You're better than that."

"Hiccup, he tried tae kill me!" Merida shouted angrily.

"And you tried to kill me the first time we met!" Hiccup snapped back in frustration, "And where would we be if I had tried to kill you back!?"

Merida flinched back as if she had been struck, tears welling up in her eyes as she looked up at Hiccup in shock. It was in that moment

Hiccup knew he had made a mistake as dread filled his heart.

"Get oot," Merida whispered as her sadness slowly turned to anger.

"Merida, I-" Hiccup began to say.

"GET OOT!" Merida shouted, tears running down her face before turning away from Hiccup.

Hiccup flinched back away from her fury, a pained look on his face. He tried to say something but was stopped as Gothi reached up and touched his arm.

"Perhaps we should let the princess have some rest," Gothi suggested, "I believe we've all had enough excitement for the day."

Hiccup looked at Gothi for a moment before glancing at Merida, who was still facing away from him with her arms crossed. Sighing sadly, Hiccup nodded in reply before turning and leaving with Gothi.

"Fishlegs, be a dear and help Helga, would you?" Gothi asked, glancing back at the young man as she walked out with Hiccup.

"Of course, Elder," Fishlegs replied with a nod before reaching down and scooping Helga out of her seat. Reaching out, Astrid pat Merida on the knee before standing up as well, gathering up Helga's crutches as she followed Fishlegs.

"Hey, so this is probably a bad time," Jack said as Fishlegs and Astrid walked by him, "But I just wanted to say no hard feel-"

Before Jack could finish, Astrid wordlessly checked him into the wall with her shoulder, stepping over him as Jack slid down the wall with a groan of pain. For a moment, Jack sat on the floor nursing his wounds. Looking up, he saw Merida sitting in the bed, facing away from the doorway. Jack quickly glanced to the side and watched as the others left before he vanished into thin air.

As soon as she was sure that the others were gone, Merida broke down, burying her face into her hands as her body was wracked with sobs. For a few moments, there was no sounds in the cottage except that of Merida's crying, a few of Gothi's Terrors peeking into the room to watch her sadly.

"So," Jack's voice said as he reappeared at the foot of the bed, causing Merida to snap her head up in surprise, "I'm guessing you're the type of girl who doesn't like people seeing her cry."

"Ah thought Ah told ye tae get oot!" Merida snapped as she wiped her nose on the back of her sleeve.

"Listen princess, I know you and I-" Jack began to say before pausing to snag the jar that Merida had tossed at his head out of the air with his free hand, "Ha! I was ready for you that time!"

"Whit th' Hel dae ye want?" Merida demanded with a growl.

"Like I was saying before you interrupted," Jack answered as he unscrewed the top of the jar and took a curious sniff of its contents, making a disgusted face before resealing it and setting it to the side, "You and I got off on the wrong foot. That's my fault, no way of getting around it."

Merida said nothing in reply, crossing her arms and glaring at Jack.

"I should have heard you out, I can see that now," Jack continued, the smile slowly falling from his face, "I could have prevented a lot of things if I had. Including that little spat you had with Hitchup there."

"It's Hiccup," Merida replied automatically, bringing a small smile to Jack's face, "An' 'at's nae any o' yer business."

"Maybe not," Jack admitted with a shrug, "But I do feel I should tell you that you've got him all wrong."

"An' how dae ye figure 'at?" Merida questioned as she continued to glare at Jack.

"You're hurt because you don't think he cares about you as much as you thought," Jack explained, "You understand his reasoning, but deep down in that selfish little part of your heart you wish he'd put you ahead of the fate of the world. Well, let me tell you, sister, he does."

"How dae ye know 'at?" Merida questioned, some of her anger fading from her face.

"He told me," Jack answered, "Trust me, there's a reason I'm standing all the way over here. Your boy said that if I so much as touched you, wellâ€¦"

Jack finished by running his thumb across his throat as he let his tongue dangle out the side of his mouth and made a crackling noise from the back of his throat.

"He said 'at?" Merida asked in surprise.

"In so many words," Jack replied with another shrug, "He's a good guy and you're everything to him. Guy would die for you."

"Ah'm sae stupid," Merida whispered as she wiped tears from her eyes, "Ah always hurt people Ah care about."

"Nah, see," Jack said, pointing at Merida, "Your problem is you let the guilt eat you up inside."

There was a pause as Merida looked at Jack in confusion.

"How dae ye dae 'at?" Merida questioned.

"Do what?" Jack asked in reply.

"Know whit Ah'm feelin' like ye jist did," Merida elaborated, "It's like ye can jistâ€¦look right through me."

"It's just one of the many quirks of being me," Jack replied with a chuckle that quickly died, "It's something I've always been able to do. I can just look someone in the eye and know what they're all about."

As he spoke, Jack looked over at Merida, his clear blue eyes meeting her icy blue ones.

"Their emotions, their hopes, their dreams," Jack explained, "Their fears. I can see it all."

"Why?" Merida questioned.

"You might as well ask me why my hair is white," Jack replied with a snort, "It's who I am princess."

Merida seemed to except this answer as the two of them fell into silence again.

"I hope this means you're not going to try to kill me anymore," Jack spoke up, "Getting my life threatened so many times in one day is pretty exhausting."

"Ah hae tae gae an' apologize tae Hic," Merida said as she began to pull herself out of the bed.

"You need to rest," Jack insisted, walking over to the side of the bed and holding his hand up to Merida, "No one knows what I did to you better than me. There will be plenty of time for you to apologize to him."

As Jack spoke, the sounds of a commotion could be heard coming from outside. A look of confusion on his face, Jack made his way over to a window to have a look at what was going on.

"Whit's happenin'?" Merida questioned with another sniffle.

"I get the feeling your boy's going to be busy for a while," Jack answered before he turned to look at her, "Because it looks to me like all your dragons just decided to up and leave."

A/N: So, I just have to say now that we've reached the point where he's started to loosen up, Jack has become insanely fun to write. I basically had to have him do or say something funny in every scene I had him in. Anyway, I hope you guys enjoyed this one because I had a lot of fun writing it. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later, and Happy Thanksgiving!

8. Call of the Wild

Chapter 8: The Call of the Wild

Hiccup walked with the others down the cliff path that led away from Gothi's hut, a depressed look on his face. Glancing over, Fishlegs made a sympathetic face before reaching over and putting his hand on Hiccup's shoulder.

"Don't worry," Fishlegs reassured Hiccup, "She'll come around."

"You just have to give her some time," Astrid added, "She can be pretty stubborn, but she still loves you."

Hiccup nodded in agreement though the look on his face didn't change as the group reached the village. Looking around, they could see the rest of the villagers and their dragons had continued with setting up decorations for Snoggletog. The large pine tree at the center of the village was mostly decorated now, with strings of red and gold colored ribbons strung through its boughs and multitudes of ornaments hanging from its branches. The only thing that remained bare was the very top. Glancing down at the base of the tree, Hiccup could see a young boy pulling himself onto a Gronckle's back as the dragon lifted into the air, a large wooden star painted gold in his hands. Next to him, Hiccup could see North standing at the base of the tree, hands on his hips as he looked up at the decorated pine.

As the group moved towards the center of the village, the group saw Snotlout moving towards them, Toothless following him with two other dragons. One of the dragons was larger than Toothless, with rust colored scales with black spots and an orange underbelly. It had a number of tall, black spines that ran from the base of its skull, down its long, slender neck and back to the tip of its tail. It walked on four legs, a pair of leathery wings, each with two sharp claws at the joint, serving as its forelegs. The dragon had a crocodilian jaw filled with sharp teeth and four black horns that grew out from the back of its head. It observed the world with a pair of burning black-on-yellow eyes.

The other dragon was even larger, serpentine in shape with greyish-green scales that had a metallic sheen to them. Steel grey spines ran down its back from its head to its tail, which was topped with sharp spikes of a similar color. The dragon's most noticeable feature were its massive wings that were twice again as big as the dragon itself and had a metallic look to them as well. Two long horns swept back from the dragons head and its long jaw was filled with sharp bone white teeth.

"Hey!" Snotlout greeted, waving at the group with his free hand, carrying a bucket of water with the other, "There you guys are! I was wondering when you would show up!"

"Hey cuz," Hiccup replied as the group came to a stop in front of Snotlout, the young man smiling as Toothless walked up next to him and nuzzled him affectionately, prompting the Viking to pat the Night Fury on the head, "We we're wondering where you were."

"Yeah well, funnily enough, it's hard to find liquid water in the middle of winter," Snotlout replied sarcastically as he reached out and stroked the red dragon on its neck, "Luckily I was able to find some helpers."

"Hey, Stormfly," Astrid greeted happily as the larger dragon leaned down and nuzzled her, prompting the young woman to wrap her good arm around it and rub her cheek against its scales affectionately, "Did you miss me?"

"Thank you for all your help, Snotlout," Hiccup said, giving his cousin a gracious smile, "If it wasn't for you, I don't know what would have happened to Merida."

"Least I could do, cuz. Speaking of which, I was just heading back to Gothi's with another bucket of water," Snotlout explained as he held up the bucket in question, "I figured all of you would be there."

At the statement, Hiccup's face fell again, causing Snotlout to look at his cousin in confusion.

"Is everything okay?" Snotlout asked sympathetically, "Is Merida alright?"

"The Princess is fine," Gothi said with a reassuring smile, reaching up and patting Snotlout on his arm, "She just needs some time to rest. Thank you for your help, though we won't be needing the water anymore."

"No problem," Snotlout replied with a shrug, pouring the bucket's contents onto the frozen ground, "So, now is somebody going to explain to me what exactly happened?"

Sighing, Hiccup quickly gave Snotlout the run down of the disaster that had occurred when he had arrived at Gothi's hut with Jack Frost in tow.

"Wow cuz, that's pretty rough," Snotlout replied sympathetically, "Speaking of which, what happened to him?"

"Happened to who?" Astrid asked in confusion.

"Jack Frost," Snotlout explained, a perplexed look on his face, "Didn't you guys notice that he's not with you?"

Shocked, the group quickly looked around the general area, finding no sign of Jack Frost's presence anywhere.

"Gods damnit," Hiccup swore in frustration as he turned back towards the other, "Alright, we'll have to fan out and find him. I don't want him just wandering around the village, doing what he pleases. I think I've got enough chaos in my life right now, I don't want anymore of it."

As soon as Hiccup had finished speaking, a loud roar cut through the air, startling everyone in the village and pulling their gazes skyward. As they watched, dozens upon dozens of dragons came flying into view, soaring over the village and the island. The dragons seemed to take no notice of the gawking Vikings below, focusing instead on flying out towards the ocean and the horizon beyond.

A sudden cry of alarm brought everyone's attention towards the great pine tree at the center of the village. As the villagers watched with horror, the young boy holding the wooden star held on desperately as the Gronckle he was riding suddenly began bucking erratically in the air. The boy let out a cry of fear as he let go of the star, which hit the frosted ground with a loud thud and kicked up a small cloud of snow.

As the villagers continued to watch, the Gronckle bucked wildly again, knocking the boy off its back, forcing him to hold onto one of the dragon's spines to keep from falling, though his grip was quickly slipping. With a cry of fear, the boy lost his grip and fell, sending him plummeting towards the hard, frozen ground below. Before he hit

the ground, North rushed over and caught him, sliding across the ground as he came to a stop.

The villagers collectively sighed in relief as North set the boy down, before a number of roars across the village caught their attention. As the Viking's watched, one by one their dragons took to the sky, joining the flock that was making their way out to sea.

Her eyes widening, Astrid turned towards her dragon, who was looking skywards as well.

"Stormfly, no!" she begged as the dragon began to flap his wings and rise up into the air, "Stormfly please! Don't go!"

The dragon ignored her, quickly lifting off into the air with a mighty flap of his wings, Snotlout's dragon following behind.

"Hey, Hookfang!" Snotlout called after the dragon, "Where are you going!?"

"Oh man, oh man," Fishlegs said with a panicked voice before he began rushing towards the village, "I have to go!"

As he watched the dragons leave, Hiccup's eyes were drawn upwards as a Nadder swooped by overhead.

"Boudica," Hiccup whispered, before a look of fearful realization crossed his features, "Toothless!"

Looking around, Hiccup quickly found Toothless making his way back up the path that the group had come down from. A look of fear on his face, Hiccup raced after Toothless as fast as the frozen ground and his artificial leg would allow. The moments passed at a breakneck pace as the two made their way up the cliff back towards where Gothi's hut was.

As Toothless reached the top, he ran up to the edge of the cliff, hopping up and down while flapping his wings impotently, glancing between the flock of dragons above and his tail, the artificial fin remaining closed no matter how much the Night Fury tried to shake it open. Hiccup reached the top a few moments later, coming to a stop a short distance behind Toothless as he crouched over with his hands on his knees, gasping for breath. Lifting his head up, Hiccup watched as Toothless turned his head back towards the sky, whining pitifully as the dragons began to disappear into the distance.

"What's going on, pal?" Hiccup questioned as he walked up next to Toothless and placed his hand on the Night Fury's back, "Where's everyone going?"

"I would gather that they're heading in a sort of that way direction," Jack Frost said as he suddenly appeared next to Hiccup, gesturing towards the horizon with his staff, causing Hiccup to jump in surprise.

"Don't do that!" Hiccup snapped angrily as he turned to look at Jack, "Where the Hel have you been anyway?"

"Here and there," Jack replied with a shrug, "I'm quite the traveler. I could give you a full list but it might take awhile and it seems

like you've got other things on your mind."

"Forget it," Hiccup growled as he rolled his eyes, "I don't suppose you've got any idea about what's going on?"

"Sorry Pickup," Jack said with a helpless shrug, "Dragons aren't exactly my forte."

"It's Hiccup," the young man corrected automatically, turning his attention towards the horizon as the last dragons disappeared into the distance, "What the Hel is going on?"

"Looks like you're not the only one with that question," Jack said, indicating towards the center of the village below them, where a large group of villagers had gathered around the decorated pine tree, "Isn't that your old man?"

Squinting his eyes, Hiccup could make out his father standing in middle of the group with his hands raised to draw attention to himself. Hiccup couldn't make out what Stoick was saying but shortly after the crowd began making its way away from the village center.

"Where are they going?" Jack questioned.

"The Great Hall," Hiccup surmised, "My dad's called a village meeting."

"That sounds important," Jack stated.

"It is," Hiccup replied with a nod before turning towards the path that led back down the cliffside, "I should get down there."

"Hiccup!" Merida's voice cutting through the cold air caused the young man to pause and turn back towards Gothi's hut as the redhead emerged, still dressed in a long tunic and clutching a wool cloak around her shoulders.

"M-Merida," Hiccup said awkwardly as he turned to face her, "You should...I mean you shouldn't be out here like this in your condition."

"Hic, whit's gaein' on?" Merida questioned with a sniffle as she rushed over to Hiccup, dancing from one foot to the other to keep the contact between her bare feet and the frozen ground at a minimum, "Gothi's Terrors jist bolted oot o' th' house an' Ah jist saw a huge flock o' dragons flyin' off."

"I-I don't know, Mer," Hiccup admitted, "All the dragons they...they just left."

"All except for one," Jack added, indicating towards Toothless who was still looking out to sea, "Though I'm guessing there is a reason for that."

"All o' them?" Merida asked worriedly, "Evenâ€|?"

"Even her," Hiccup confirmed sadly, "I saw her flying off with the others."

"Why did they all leave?" Merida question in confusion, taking another sniff with her stuffed up nose, "Where are they gaein'?"

"I don't know," Hiccup admitted with a shake of his head, "Dad's called a town meeting. Maybe I can learn something there."

"Alright, whit are we waitin' fer then?" Merida questioned as she moved to walk past Hiccup towards the cliff path.

"Wait a second. Mer," Hiccup said as he stepped in front of her, blocking her way, "You need to stay here and rest, you're still not well."

"Hic, Ah-" Merida began to argue, but stopped as Hiccup reached out and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Merida I...I need you to be better," Hiccup said, looking her right in the eye as he spoke, "Look...I-I'm sorry for-"

"N-Nae," Merida cut him off, her teeth starting to chatter from the cold, "Let me stop ye right there. Ye daenae need tae apologize. Whit happened earlier, 'at was ma fault. Ah...Ah was bein' selfish. Ah was jist thinkin' aboot me an' we hae th' whole world tae worry aboot."

"You are my whole world, Mer," Hiccup said with a soft smile, "I don't know what'd I'd do without you. I'd do anything for you."

"Ah know," Merida replied with a smile of her own, "Ah've heard."

"From who?" Hiccup questioned in bemused confusion.

Merida's only reply was to glance to the side. Following her gaze, Hiccup looked over at Jack, who was leaning on his staff a short distance away, absent-mindedly picking lint off of his cloak. Noticing a lull in the conversation, Jack looked up, surprised to find Merida and Hiccup looking at him.

"What?" Jack questioned, "Did I miss something? I wasn't really paying attention."

Merida and Hiccup chuckled at Jack's reaction before turning to face one another again.

"Ah'm sorry," Merida stated with a small smile.

"Me too," Hiccup replied with a smile of his own, "Never fight again?"

"Let's nae make promises we cannae keep," Merida chuckled in reply as she leaned closer to Hiccup, "Ah can dae ye th' next best thin' though."

"What's that?" Hiccup questioned as he leaned in as well, allowing Merida to reach over and grab the back of his head before yanking him forward and crushing his lips against hers. They stayed like that for a few moments before slowly pulling apart.

"'At," Merida answered cheekily, letting go of Hiccup's head as she shivered half from the cold and half from something else, "Ah think Ah better gae back inside now."

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed with a nod, "I'll go see if I can figure out what's going on with the dragons."

"Good luck," Merida said as she made her way back to Hilde's hut, glancing back at Hiccup as she went, "Ah love ye."

"I love you too," Hiccup replied with a smile.

"Aw man," Jack said as he walked up next to Hiccup, resting his elbow on the Viking's shoulder, "Aren't you two the cutest thing?"

"Oh, ane more thin' afore Ah ferget!" Merida declared as she rushed back over and swiftly kicked Jack in the shin, prompting the godling to yelp in pain and hop on one foot as he clutched his injured shin.

"What was that for!?" Jack demanded as he rubbed his injured shin.

"Ah'm still mad 'at ye tried tae kill me!" Merida declared before flashing a smile at Hiccup and rushing back to Gothi's hut.

"Seriously?" Jack questioned as he looked incredulously at Hiccup.

"Come on," Hiccup replied with a chuckle before looking at Toothless as he made his way towards the path, "Toothless, you coming?"

Toothless glanced over at Hiccup before hesitantly looking back to the horizon. After a moment he turned away from the cliff edge and began making his way down the path alongside Hiccup.

"Seriously though," Jack called after them as he hobbled along behind, "I think she may have broken something."

Later,

The sun had started to set as Hiccup reached the Great Hall, which packed with the villagers who had answered their chieftain's call, their worried voices clashing with the festive decorations that covered the walls. The door creaking loudly as he pushed it open, Hiccup stepped inside and quickly found everyone's eyes on him. As the door closed behind him, a group of villagers swarmed Hiccup, brimming with questions.

"What's happening?" one villager questioned.

"Why did they leave?" another asked.

"What if they never come back!?" a third villager inquired with a panicked voice.

"Calm down!" Stoick ordered as he pushed his way through the crowd and shoved some of the villagers back, "Give him a chance to

speak!"

Taking a calming breath, Stoick turned his attention towards his son.

"Hiccup, where have all of our dragons gone?" Stoick asked, a helpless look on his face.

"I...I don't know Dad," Hiccup replied with a shake of his head.

"Snoggletog is ruined!" a villager declared in despair.

"It's not ruined!" Stoick argued, turning to address the gathered villagers, "We're Vikings! We've been perfectly happy celebrating without dragons for generations and there's no reason we can't do it again."

As his father spoke, Hiccup took the time to glance around the room, finding his friends gathered together near the edge of the gathered villagers. Pushing through the crowd towards them, Hiccup noticed North sitting on a bench nearby, drinking a tankard full of mead.

"Hey," Hiccup greeted, noticing the depressed looks on his friends' faces.

"Hey," Astrid greeted in return, as the others nodded at me, "So, you really have no idea what happened with the dragons?"

"Not a clue, sorry," Hiccup shook his head sadly, glancing over at North, "I don't suppose you have any ideas?"

"_Net_," North replied with a shake of his head, "I am not knowing much about dragons. I am sorry zat I am not being more useful. Deed your dragon leave as vell?"

"No, he's waiting outside" Hiccup answered, "Though I think he wanted to go. He just can't fly without me."

"Most of us aren't so lucky," Tuff muttered, earning him an annoyed look and an elbow to the gut from his sister.

"Did you ever find, Jack?" Fishlegs questioned, evidently nervous about something.

"Yeah," Hiccup replied pensively, glancing around the Great Hall until he noticed Jack in the rafters, leaning against one of the beams and giving him a small salute, "He's around."

"Now, we don't know where our dragons have gone off to," Stoick continued as he stood at the center of the crowd, "But we have to have faith that they'll be back again soon. Am I right?"

The crowd murmured in affirmation, though it was clear they were still unhappy with the situation.

"I don't think it was his intention," Ruff spoke up as the crowd began to talk amongst themselves, "But the chief's speech was kind of depressing."

"I know," Astrid agreed with a sad sigh, "I was really looking forward to spending the holiday with Stormfly."

"What are you being so fidgety about?" Tuff questioned as he glanced at Fishlegs, who was nervously playing with his hands again.

"Oh, nothing," Fishlegs replied quickly, "Nothing at all."

Before Tuff could push the matter any further, Astrid suddenly gasped as her eyes lit up.

"I've got an idea!" Astrid declared with excitement as she turned to address the group. "Let's come up with some new holiday traditions. You know, to bury the sadness!"

"Wow, now that was depressing," Jack suddenly spoke up from amongst them, causing the Vikings to jump back in alarm, "Oh yeah, I'm down here now."

Seeing Snotlout and the twins reaching for their weapons, Hiccup quickly stepped in front of them, his hands raised.

"Easy guys, it's okay," Hiccup explained, "Everything's alright now, we've come to an agreement."

"The agreement mostly being that I apologize profusely and you all don't try and cut my head off," Jack added with a smile, holding his crook with both hands and resting his weight on it.

"I'm not sure I agree with this agreement," Ruff commented as she folded her arms and glared at Jack.

"Yeah, if you decide you want to go again, I'm sure it will go as well for you as it did last time," Jack said dismissively, causing Ruff to growl at him.

"Jack," North admonished, shooting the godling a glare.

"Sorry," Jack relented, holding up one of his hands in peace, "Sorry."

Ruff merely snorted in reply before turning away.

"I think it's best if we all headed for home," Hiccup said, addressing the group, "Night's already falling and we've all had a long, stressful day. We should all get some rest."

The others nodded in agreement and they all began making their way towards the exit along with other villagers who had similar ideas. As he walked, Hiccup felt a hand on his shoulder. Turning, he found North smiling down at him.

"Eet ees being long day, _da_?" North questioned with a chuckle.

"You don't know the half of it," Hiccup replied with a sigh.

"If there ees anyway I can be helping you get your dragons back, just be saying zee vord," North stated as he began walking towards the

door again, "You have been helping me veeth my problems, I am being happy to help you veeth yours."

"Thanks North," Hiccup replied with a smile as he followed, "That means alot."

"Do not be vorrying about it," North stated, his smile growing wider, "How is ze _Printsessa _doing?"

"She's doing alright, it looks like she'll recover fine," Hiccup answered as he pushed the door open and held it so North exit the Great Hall, "She's got a bit of a cold now though and she'll need some bed rest."

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod, a pensive look on his face as he stepped outside, "Perhaps I veell be speaking veeth her tomorrow. Answer some questions she is having."

"I think she'd like that," Hiccup agreed as he stepped outside as well.

"Eet ees being settled zen," North said with a laugh and a clap of his hands before he began walking towards his cottage, "Be having a good night, Hiccup Dragonrider."

"You too," Hiccup replied with a small wave, watching North as he walked away. Turning away, Hiccup caught sight of Toothless standing on a nearby cliff, watching the rapidly darkening sky. Seeing Toothless look so forlorn brought a sad look to Hiccup's face.

"Copper for your thoughts?" Jack asked as he suddenly appeared next to Hiccup, causing the young man to start in surprise, bringing a smirk to Jack's lips.

"I was just thinking about what Tuff said earlier," Hiccup replied, shooting a glare at Jack, "How I'm the lucky one to have a dragon that can't leave without me. As much as I'm happy that he's still here, I can't help but notice how sad he looks."

"Well, of course he is," Jack said nonchalantly, before continuing as he noticed Hiccup's questioning look, "I mean whatever's going on with the dragons, it seems pretty important, and he's the only one who can't join in."

A sad look of understanding passed over Hiccup's features as he looked up at Toothless, the Night Fury silhouetted black against the light of the rising moon.

"I mean let me put it to you this way," Jack continued as he began to rise into the air, looking down at Hiccup as he talked, a small breeze kicking up as he flew, "If someone took away my ability to fly on my own, I certainly wouldn't be happy about it."

With that, Jack flew off into the night and flitted out of view, leaving Hiccup alone with his thoughts.

A/N: Hey guys! Sorry it's been so long since my last update but I've been super busy the last month. With the New Year coming though, I'm hoping to really ramp up on my writing, so expect more in the future!

Hope you guys liked this chapter, it was a pretty interesting one to write. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review. Happy Holidays!

9. Winter Wonderland

Chapter 9: Winter Wonderland

Grey clouds hung over the island of Berk, blocking out the sun and casting everything in muted, dreary colors. The dreariness extended to Merida's room in Stoick's house at the top of the hill. Sneezing, Merida sniffled miserably, sitting up in her bed with a blanket covering her legs, dressed only in one of her sleeping gowns with Varis perched on the headboard. As she wiped her nose on the back of her hand, the sound of heavy footsteps brought her attention to her door before somebody gently knocked.

"_Printsessa?_" she heard North call through the door, "Ees eet being alright for me to be coming in?"

"Sure, North," Merida replied with another sniff, prompting North to open the door and step through.

"_Dobroe utro_, " North greeted with a smile as he walked up to the foot of Merida's bed, "How are you feeling today?"

Merida only sniffled in reply, looking at North with watery eyes.

"I am seeing," North replied with a chuckle, "Lucky for you, I am coming to you today to be making your day more enjoyable."

"How dae ye plan on daein' 'at?" Merida questioned.

"By teaching you somezing zat no one else ees able to be teaching you," North replied, walking to the side of Merida's bed and sitting on it, the frame creaking under his weight.

"Whit's 'at?" Merida asked in confusion.

"I am zinking you are knowing," North answered, his grin growing larger.

"Ye're gaein' tae teach me aboot this...sense we share," Merida surmised, a small smile appearing on her face as well.

"Indeed I am," North answered with a nod.

"Sae, how dae ye plan on daein' 'at?" Merida questioned.

"Ve veell start by being seemple," North said as he turned to directly face Merida as best he could, holding both of his hands out to her, palms up, "Be geeving me your hands."

Adjusting her position, Merida reached out and placed her hands in North's calloused ones, leading the Rus to wrap his fingers around them.

"Now, I am needing you to be closing your eyes," North said, prompting Merida to follow his instruction.

"Good," North said with a smile and a nod, "Now, I am needing you to be taking a deep breath and be letting everyzing go."

"Whit dae ye mean 'let everythin' gae'?" Merida questioned, opening one of her eyes to shoot North a questioning look.

"Eet means you must be forgetting all your vorries and your stresses," North explained, "Eet means you must become somezing empty. Somezing hollow."

"Ah daenae understand a thin' ye're sayin' tae me right now," Merida replied, growing more frustrated as she opened both eyes to shoot a glare at North.

"Just be closing your eyes," North insisted, "Close your eyes and be zinking of nozing."

"How dae Ah think o' naethin'?" Merida questioned as she closed her eyes again.

"You must be relaxing and be emptying your mind," North explained, "Be focusing on your breathing. Breath een and breath out. Breath een and breath out."

North continued to repeat the phrase prompting Merida to take in a deep breath before slowly letting it out. As she continued to repeat the process, Merida felt herself growing calmer and calmer, as if she was exhaling all her troubles. Even her cold seemed to fall away as she relaxed.

"Very good," North congratulated her, "Now, are you feeling anyzing?"

"Ah...Ah daenaeâ€|" Merida began to say before her face scrunched up in confusion, "Wait...yes, Ah dae feel saemethin'."

"What are you feeling?" North questioned.

"Ah...Ah daenae know," Merida tried to explain, "It's like naethin' Ah've ever felt afore. It's cold an' hot at th' same time an' it feels...almost alive."

"Can you be telling me where eet ees?" North pressed gently.

"Ah thinkâ€|" Merida said as she tried to concentrate before she let out a small gasp of surprise, "It's comin' from ye."

"Indeed," North responded with a chuckle, before he tightened his grip on Merida's hands, "Be telling me vhat ees happening now."

"It's growin'," Merida replied before shaking her head, "Nae wait, saeme o' it is flowin' away. Ah think it's gaein' down yer arms an' -"

Merida let out another gasp as she flinched back, North holding his grip on her hands.

"Whit are ye daein'?" Merida questioned, snapping her eyes open to

look at North as she felt something flowing down her arms, both cold and hot at the same time.

"I am showing you somezing," North explained, keeping his grip tight on Merida's hands, "Somezing you never knew vas zere."

Quickly, the sensation made its way down Merida's arms, around her shoulders before rushing into her chest. As it reached her center, a shock went through Merida's entire body, causing her to shudder and crunch up slightly, as Varis cawed from his perch.

"I am knowing zat zees ees being scary," North said with a reassuring voice, "But there ees nozing to be being afraid of. Zees ees being nozing new. Zees has always been being eenside of you. Now zat you are seeing eet een me, I can be showing eet een you."

Slowly, Merida caught her breath and sat up straight again.

"Can you feel eet?" North questioned.

"Yes," Merida replied with a nod as she closed her eyes again, "It's inside me now, but...it feels like it always has been."

"Because eet has been," North stated, "You are being like me, being like Hilde was. You are magi."

"Ah daenae understand," Merida said, looking at North in confusion, "Does 'at mean ma father is magi? Or ma mother?"

"Eet does not," North answered, "Magi ees not being een your blood, eet ees being een your soul. Eet ees being very rare zat two magi veell be related. Een all likelihood, neither your mozer, nor your fazer, nor your brozers are magi. Zere ees only being you."

"How can 'at be?" Merida questioned, "How can Ah jist be magi?"

"Like I am saying, eet ees not being een your blood, eet ees being een your soul," North explained, "Zee soul ees being eternal. Eet travels across time leeving one life to zee next, being replanted again and again by zee spirit of life. You are learning zees een your churches, _da_"

"More or less," Merida replied, a pensive look on her face, "Sae, Ah'm magi because th' spirit o' life gave me th' soul o' a magi?"

"_Da_," North answered with a nod.

"Why?" Merida questioned, "Why me?"

"Because you are being important," North answered, "You are having a role to play een vhat happens, just as much as Hiccup and Jack."

"And ye're gaein' tae teach me how?" Merida questioned, looking at North hopefully.

"Of course," North replied with a laugh, "Vhy else would I be telling you all of zis?"

"Great!" Merida said excitedly, "Sae, what's next?"

"Let us not be getting ahead of ourselves, _Printsessa_," North replied with a chuckle, "First, you must become familiar veeth ze magic zat ees being inside your soul. Be getting use to ze feel of it, be practicing reaching out to eet so zat you may be doing so more easily een ze future. Only when you have mastered ze magic eenside of yourself may you be using eet outside of yourself."

"Alright," Merida replied with a resolute nod, "Ah'll practice then."

"Very good," North said with a smile and a nod, "I veell be leaving you to eet zen. Be keeping up your practice and I might be having more to show you tomorrow."

Merida smiled and nodded in reply before closing her eyes and taking a deep, calming breath. North smiled at this before he quietly left Merida's room, shutting the door behind him as he went.

Meanwhile,

Using a clump of half-frozen snow as a cushion, Jack Frost sat on the roof of one of the houses near the center of the village, looking down at the villagers as they went about their day. As he watched from his perch, Jack couldn't help but notice that the dreary weather seemed to be reflecting the dreary attitudes of the villagers. Looking down, he saw a trio of children shifting snow into the shape of a Gronckle, sighing sadly as they looked at it. Jack frowned at the sight, before the sound of a familiar voice caught his attention.

"Fishlegs!" Astrid called out, balancing a wooden tray with two tankards on it on her good hand as she made her way through the village, "Fishlegs, where are you!?"

As Astrid turned a corner, she happened to bump right into Fishlegs as the young man was following the sound of her voice.

"Whoa!" Astrid exclaimed as she bounced off Fishlegs' bulk and slipped on the ice, sending her falling towards the ground as the tray slipped from her hands. Before Astrid could hit the ground, Jack suddenly appeared behind her in a gust of wind and a flurry of snowflakes, catching her with one hand. Reaching out, Jack managed to catch the falling tray and balance it on the end of his staff before adjusting it to catch the two tankards as well without spilling a single drop of their contents.

"Easy there," Jack said as he lifted her back onto her feet and took the tray off of the tip of his staff, spinning it on one finger before handing it back to Astrid, "It's a bit slippery out today."

"Are you okay?" Fishlegs questioned with a worried expression.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Astrid replied, ignoring Jack, causing the spirit to frown.

"No, no need to thank me," Jack said sarcastically, "I'm just happy to help."

"What do you want?" Astrid snapped as she turned back around to glare at Jack, "Haven't you already done enough harm around here?"

"Wow sister, next time I'll just let you fall on your ass if this is the kind of thanks I get," Jack replied as he narrowed his eyes at her.

"He's right, Astrid," Fishlegs said before Astrid could say anymore, "I'm not a fan of him either but he was just trying to help you."

Astrid merely humphed in reply and turned away from Jack again. Jack rolled his eyes at her before he took a sniff of the air and made a disgusted face.

"Ugh, what is that?" Jack questioned as he looked between Astrid and Fishlegs, "Is that one of you?"

"If you must know, it is the delicious new drink I made for the holidays," Astrid replied, holding the tray up to Jack so that he could see the chunky white liquid that filled the tankards, "I call it Yaknog."

"I think I'd yak nog all over you if I drank any of that," Jack stated as he gently pushed the tray back towards Astrid.

"Would you rather taste a punch in the face?" Astrid threatened as she glared at Jack.

"You know what Astrid, I think that it sounds delightful," Fishlegs said as he reached out and took a tankard from the tray, "I'd love to try some."

As Fishlegs took a swig of the Yaknog, Astrid smiled at him before shooting a victorious smirk at Jack. Jack's eyes however were trained on Fishlegs as the young man's eyes shot open as the Yaknog filled his mouth, a shiver going through his body as he forced the drink down his throat.

"Oh wow," Fishlegs said with a cough, "You can really taste the yak."

As Astrid and Jack watched, Fishlegs bent over slightly, clutching his stomach as he let out an uncomfortable burp.

"Fishlegs, are you okay?" Astrid questioned with concern.

"Are you crying?" Jack asked as he leaned in with a grin that threatened to split his face.

"I-I'm fine," Fishlegs replied as his stomach gurgled discontentedly.

"Hate to break it to you, sweetheart, but I don't think your drink is going to become the new holiday hit," Jack said as he grinned at Astrid.

"Well, at least I'm trying," Astrid replied defensively, "Part of the reason that people are so unhappy right now is because you showed up. I don't see you doing anything about it."

"Maybe I will," Jack retorted as he turned and began to walk away.

"Will you now?" Astrid questioned with a chuckle, "And what do you know about cheering people up? About having fun?"

"Honey, I'll have you know that I wrote the book on having fun." Jack replied as he turned back towards Astrid and smiled at her, "If you'd like, I'll show you the first lesson."

"Oh yeah?" Astrid challenged, "And what's that?"

A split second after Astrid asked the question, she was hit square in the face by a wad of snow, causing her to drop the tray she was carrying and spill the Yaknog onto the ground. After she quickly wiped the snow from her face, Astrid saw Jack grinning at her, a snowball in his free hand.

"And that was lesson number one, sweet cheeks," Jack stated as he pointed a finger at Astrid and winked at her.

"You're dead!" Astrid shouted before she charged at Jack, the spirit's grin reaching its breaking point as he turned and fled down the street towards the center of the village.

"Come here!" Astrid shouted as she chased after Jack, the two catching the attention of the other villagers as they ran circles around the decorated pine tree, the spirit laughing hysterically as he danced just out of Astrid's reach.

"Watch your step!" Jack declared before he blasted the ground with frost, covering it in a thin layer of ice. As Astrid chased Jack around the tree again, she lost her footing on the ice, sending her sliding out of control before she crashed into a snow bank. Pulling herself out, Astrid shook her face clear of snow before glaring at Jack who was standing a few feet away.

"I tried to warn you," Jack stated with a helpless shrug before quickly ducking as Astrid hurled a snowball at him, leading to it instead hitting a young boy in the face and knocking him to the ground.

"Oh my gosh!" Astrid gasped as she pulled herself out of the snowbank, ignoring Jack's laughter as she approached the child with concern, "I'm so sorry, are you-"

Before she could finish, Astrid was beamed on the side of the head by another snowball. Turning towards the source, Astrid found a little girl looking up at her, giggling as she began rolling up another snowball. As a small smile began to form on Astrid's face, the sound of laughter brought her attention back to Jack.

"Nice shot, kid!" Jack congratulated before he was hit on the side by another snowball. Soon enough, the entire village center erupted into a giant snowball fight as more and more villagers were dragged into

the fray. Laughter filled the air as snow flew in every direction.

Perching on top of the pine tree, Jack grinned as he looked down at the chaotic fun happening below. As he watched, Jack saw Astrid and Fishlegs laughing as they tossed snowballs at one another before Astrid playfully tackled the larger boy into a snowbank.

"Who says I don't know anything about having fun?" Jack questioned with a satisfied grin as he brushed his hands off triumphantly. From his perch, Jack took a quick glance over the village before he saw something that caught his attention. Turning towards it, Jack looked quizzically at the smithy with smoke rising from the chimney before a sly grin crossed his features.

Inside the smithy, Hiccup was busy hammering some metal against the anvil, the light from the furnace providing the only illumination. As Hiccup continued to work, the furnace suddenly gutted out in a blast of cold air, filling the smithy with smoke. Coughing, Hiccup placed his hammer down as he began to try and wave the smoke away, only to come face to face with Jack perched on the anvil.

"Whatcha working on?" Jack questioned as Hiccup jumped back in surprise.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to do that!?" Hiccup snapped before looking at the quickly cooling furnace, "I needed that fire, you know."

"Sorry," Jack apologized with a sheepish smile, "I was trying a trick I've seen North do before. Not sure how he does it without putting the fire out."

Hopping off of the anvil, Jack noticed something sitting on the workbench sitting nearby.

"So, like I asked before, what are you working on?" Jack questioned as he looked over the large object, an artificial fin similar to the one that Toothless wore.

"Honestly?" Hiccup questioned, "I couldn't stop thinking about what you said to me last night. About Toothless not being able to fly on his own."

"Oh?" Jack asked as Hiccup walked up next to him.

"Yeah, it's not fair to him," Hiccup continued as he pulled a lever that adjusted the fin, "So, I stayed up late last night making this."

"So, this will let him fly without you?" Jack questioned.

Hiccup nodded in reply, a small smile on his face.

"What if he doesn't come back?" Jack asked, a thoughtful look on his face.

"I guess I'll just have to trust he will," Hiccup replied, his smile falling away.

Turning back towards the furnace, Hiccup sighed again.

"It's not finished yet though, and like I said, I need the furnace in order to finish it," Hiccup stated.

"Guess you'll have to relight it," Jack observed with a small smile.

"It's not exactly easy," Hiccup stated as he walked over to the furnace and picked up some flint and tinder. Before he could use it, Jack walked up next to him and placed a cold hand on Hiccups.

"Not like that," Jack said as Hiccup gave him a confused look.

"What are you talking about?" Hiccup questioned.

"Lesson number two," Jack replied with a smile as he held up two fingers.

"So, you want me to light the fire by myself," Hiccup surmised as he looked down at his burned hand.

"Exactly," Jack replied.

"Okay, how exactly do I do that?" Hiccup questioned.

"Like I told you before, your gift is connected to your emotions," Jack explained, "Positive emotions let you calm the fire."

"Meaning negative emotions stoke it," Hiccup finished.

"That's the idea," Jack answered with a nod as he leaned back against a workbench, "The trick is not letting your emotions get out of control. If you let the fire inside you rage out of control, the fire outside will as well."

"That's encouraging," Hiccup sighed before he reached his burnt hand out towards the furnace and closed his eyes. Taking a deep breath, he concentrated, focusing on an image within his mind's eye. As he focused, his scar slowly began to glow as heat began to rise off of his skin. As Hiccup concentrated, his face wrapped into a scowl while the burn on his hand glowed red hot. With a woosh of air, the fuel in the furnace suddenly ignited as fire sprung to life inside.

"Nicely done," Jack congratulated as he clapped his hands while Hiccup opened his eyes, glaring at the burning furnace, "Hope you weren't thinking of me."

"I wasn't," Hiccup replied, continued to scowl at the fire, "I don't hate you, but there is someone I do."

"Oh yeah?" Jack questioned with a chuckle, "Who's that?"

"The man who killed my mother," Hiccup replied as he clutched his burnt hand into a fist, causing it to ignite as well, an aura of flame dancing over his skin.

"Oh," Jack replied, his face falling as he looked at Hiccup sympathetically, "I'm...I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," Hiccup replied as he held up his burning hand and looked at it with an almost impassive look on his face, "You didn't know."

Taking a calming breath, Hiccup clenched his hand into a fist again, gutting the fire on his skin. Opening his eyes, Hiccup looked at his hand as he flexed it before turning back towards Jack.

"Thank you for your help, Jack," Hiccup stated as he looked Jack in the eye, "I really appreciate you taking the time to help me. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come to Berk."

"Hey, don't worry about it," Jack replied with a nonchalant shrug before he began making his way towards the door, "Do me a favor though."

"What's that?" Hiccup questioned before he was struck square in the face by a snowball.

"Try to lighten up," Jack said with a laugh, "It's the holidays after all, Situp."

With that Jack stepped through the door and was gone, laughing as he went. Hiccup wiped the snow of his face and shook his head clear. He looked at the door Jack had gone through for a moment before chuckling and going back to his work.

A/N: Another week, another chapter. This was a fun little chapter to write, especially for the developments both Hiccup and Merida make. Hope you guys liked this as well! As always, feedback and critique is always welcome, so please review! Later!

10. Dreamscapes

Chapter 10: Dreamscapes

"Toothless!" Hiccup called as he made his way through the village, looking for the Night Fury, the new prosthetic fin resting on his shoulder, "Toothless, where are you!?"

"Hiccup!" Merida's voice floated over the village, bringing Hiccup's attention towards their house, where he saw Merida sitting on the front steps, bundled up in furs next to Toothless, the Night Fury curled up on the ground, "Over here!"

Smiling, Hiccup made his way up the hill to the house, Toothless raising his head to look at the young man as Merida smiled and pat the Night Fury on the head.

"Shouldn't you be inside?" Hiccup questioned as he looked at Merida with concern, "You're still fighting off that cold."

"Ah'm fine," Merida reassured him with a small snuffle, "Ah'm feelin' much better and saeme fresh air will dae me good."

"If you say so," Hiccup replied as he set the artificial fin down and leaned it against the house, "Did North end up stopping by?"

"Yes," Merida replied, her eyes gleaming with excitement, "Ye'll

ne'er believe whit he showed me!"

"What?" Hiccup questioned as he sat down next to her on the steps.

"Ah'm a magi, Hic," she replied with a grin, "Jist like him an' Hilde!"

"Really?" Hiccup questioned in surprise, "So, you can talk to spirits and stuff?"

"Ah guess," Merida answered with a shrug, "Ah mean, nae yet, Ah daenae think. North jist kind o' showed me ma potential. He showed me whit was inside me ma whole life."

"Well, you didn't need North for that," Hiccup said with a grin, "I've always known you're pretty magical."

"Ye're such a flirt," Merida replied, rolling her eyes before leaning over and kissing Hiccup on the cheek, "'At's why Ah love ye."

"And here I thought it was my winning personality," Hiccup joked.

"'At helps too," Merida responded as she leaned against Hiccup, resting her head on his shoulder.

"Things are so different now," Hiccup commented with a slight shake of his head, "You're a magi, I've been blessed by a god, we both know how to ride dragons and we're preparing to face the return of an evil god who wants to take over the world."

Hiccup sighed before smirking.

"I remember when my biggest problem was getting you to like me," Hiccup continued as he glanced at Merida.

"Well, ye did a fantastic job with 'at," Merida said, reaching up and grabbing Hiccup's head before pulling him into a quick kiss, "This other stuff shud be easy."

"I certainly hope so," Hiccup replied as he smiled down at her.

"Sae, whit's all this?" Merida questioned, gesturing to the new fin that Hiccup had brought with him, "Did ye make Toothless a new fin?"

"I did," Hiccup answered with another sigh, "With this, he should be able to fly on his own."

"Ye're jokin'," Merida stated in surprise as she sat up straight and looked at Hiccup.

"Nope," Hiccup replied as he stood up and grabbed the fin before turning to show it to Merida, "It attaches to Toothless' good fin and the gears I made make it so that when he flexes his real fin, the artificial one will flex with it."

"'At...at's ingenious, Hic," Merida said in awe before a concerned

look crossed her face, "Dae ye think it's a good idea though? Whit ifâ€|"

"I know," Hiccup finished for her, his face falling as he spoke, "I've already thought of that and if it comes to that, I'm just going to have to hope he comes back."

"Okay," Merida replied with a nod, a worried look still on her face, "Well, there's nae time like th' present, right?"

"Right," Hiccup replied with a nod before he turned to look at Toothless, the Night Fury watching the two curiously, "Hey bud, I've got something for you."

Drawing closer, Toothless looked at the artificial fin as Hiccup held it out to him, the Night Fury giving the prosthesis a curious sniff.

"What do you think of that?" Hiccup questioned with a chuckle as he made his way over to Toothless' tail, "Let me get this on you."

Straddling Toothless' tail, Hiccup quickly latched the fin onto the Night Fury, clicking it into place on the dragon's good fin.

"There," Hiccup said with a small smile as he patted Toothless' tail, "You are going to love this."

As Hiccup stepped off his tail, Toothless pulled it towards himself with a confused grunt. Growing agitated at the alien feeling of the new fin, Toothless roared as he began to thrash around, trying to knock the prosthesis off of his tail.

"Toothless, stop!" shouted worriedly as he dodged out of the way of the Night Fury's thrashing, Merida letting out a surprised gasp behind him, "Toothless, please wait!"

Before Hiccup could do anything, the artificial fin suddenly snapped open, causing Toothless to freeze as he looked at it in surprise. Studying it for a few moments, Toothless calmed as he flexed his tailfin experimentally, watching as the artificial fin moved with the real one.

"There, see?" Hiccup said with a smile as he caught his breath, "Pretty cool, right?"

Slowly, Toothless turned and looked at Hiccup with wide eyes, silent except for his breathing. For a few moments, Toothless did nothing but stare at Hiccup, causing the young man to look at the Night Fury in concerned confusion.

"Toothless?" Hiccup questioned as he reached out towards the Night Fury. As he did, Toothless suddenly flinched away before spinning around a leaping into the air, kicking up a cloud of snow in his wake. As the snow settled, Toothless' roar brought Hiccup's attention skyward, giving him a brief glimpse of the Night Fury before he disappeared into the clouds.

For a few, long moments, Hiccup did nothing but stare up at the grey

sky, a shocked look plastered on his face. As he watched the overcast sky, he barely registered the sound of Merida walking up next to him.

"Oh...Oh Hic," she said sadly, looking between Hiccup and the sky, "Oh Hic, Ah'm...Ah'm sae sorry."

Hiccup said nothing as he turned to look at her, a lost look in his eyes. Seeing him like that only made Merida sadder, prompting her to reach out and pull Hiccup into a hug, the blanket she had draped around her shoulders falling to the ground. For a moment, Hiccup simply let her hug him, his arms hanging limply hanging at his sides, before he slowly wrapped his arms around her and buried his face into the crook of her neck.

Later,

Night had fallen over Berk, a few stars managing to shine through the clouds that still covered the sky. Inside their house, Merida, dressed in her nightgown, stood outside of the doorway to Hiccup's room, leaning against the wall as she looked through the crack of his door, a flickering candle illuminating the room, allowing her to see him laying in bed with his back to her.

"Dae ye want me tae get th' candle?" Merida questioned, playing with one of her red locks that barely hung past her ear.

"No, I've got it," Hiccup replied, moving underneath his blanket before the candle suddenly guttered out.

"How did yeâ€¦|" Merida began to say, a surprised look on her face.

"I've been practicing with Jack," Hiccup explained from the darkness of his room, "Good night."

"Night," Merida replied quietly before she reached out and closed his door. Merida stared at the door for a few quiet moments before sighing and leaning against the wall.

She hated seeing him like this. As much as she missed her own dragon, Merida knew that no person and dragon had a stronger bond than Hiccup and Toothless. She knew that if there was anything Hiccup cared about as much as her, it would be Toothless.

It ached Merida's heart to see Hiccup like this, but it hurt even more knowing there was nothing she could do about it.

"Ye'd think now 'at Ah had magic Ah cud figure oot where a flock o' bloody dragons went," she muttered to herself with a sniffle, looking down at her hands before sighing impotently and resting her head back against the wall.

"Nae use frettin' all night aboot it though," she said before yawning and heading to her own room. Rubbing her eyes, Merida crawled into bed and pulled her fur blanket up to her chin, falling asleep almost the instant her head touched her pillow.

As the world faded around her, Merida almost instantly noticed something different. Both the warmth of her blanket and the chill of

the air fell away, as did all the sounds she associated with Berk at night. Instead of the feel of her bed beneath her, she felt weightless, as if she floating. It wasn't until she felt her feet come in contact with something that she snapped her eyes open.

Wherever Merida was, it certainly was not her room.

Before Merida was what looked like an endless desert made of golden, sparkling sand beneath a sky covered in shifting, purple clouds. As she watched, the sand dunes shifted before her very eyes, rolling across the desert like waves on the ocean. Merida watched in confusion as a dune rolled past her, the sand shifting beneath her bare feet as it passed. Reaching down, Merida scooped up a handful of sand before letting it slowly run out of her hand and back onto the ground, the grains feeling smooth and cool to her touch.

"Where th' bloody Hel am Ah?" Merida questioned as she looked around in confusion again, her voice echoing unusually. As the dunes continued to shift around her, Merida suddenly could make out a figure standing on top of one of the dunes some distance away.

"Hey!" Merida shouted, cupping her mouth with one hand while waving the other above her head to catch the stranger's attention, "Oi, ye over there!"

Merida could have sworn she saw the figure start to turn around but by the time they did, the dunes had shifted again, causing the figure to disappear as another dune swept by. By the time the dune had passed, the figure was nowhere to be seen.

"Damnit," Merida swore softly before sighing and looking around again, "Ah need tae figure oot whit's gaein' on here."

As Merida looked around some more, she noticed another figure walking by a short distance away from her.

"Hey!" Merida called as she began trotting over to the person, the sand feeling oddly spongy as she walked across it, "Hey, ye!"

As Merida approached the figure, she felt her heart skip a beat as she recognized the young man.

"Hiccup!?" Merida called as he increased her pace, rushing to catch up with the Viking as he slowly wandered in another direction, "Hic, is 'at ye!?"

"It's me!" Merida exclaimed as he ran around in front of Hiccup, "It's Meriâ€¦".

Merida trailed off, her expression changing to a look of surprise and confusion as she got a good look at Hiccup. He appeared to be asleep, with his eyes closed and his breathe slow. Merida could even swear she heard the slight sound of snoring.

"Whit in th' world," Merida muttered as she slowly reached out towards Hiccup as he wandered past her. Before she could touch him though, another hand suddenly latched onto her wrist and stopped her. Merida let out a small squeak of surprise before whipping her head

around to look at the hand's owner.

Next to Merida was a little man who stood barely half as tall as she did. He was a plump fellow with a friendly, pale face and amber colored eyes. He wore a robe that seemed to wrap around his round form and which appeared to be made of the sand that swirled around them. Similarly, his wild, spiky hair also seemed to be made of the sand and stuck out in every direction.

As Merida looked at him in surprise, he slowly shook his head at her before glancing at Hiccup as the young man wandered by.

"Who th' Hel are-" Merida began to say, before the little man quickly brought his finger up to his lips, urging the princess to be quiet, catching the young woman off guard enough to get her to comply.

"Who are ye?" Merida questioned, her voice barely above a whisper as the little man released her wrist. The man seemed perplexed by the question, tapping his chin with his finger as he thought, a few times looking like he had an idea before quickly dismissing it with a shake of his head. As she watched the little man think, something occurred to Merida.

"Ye...Ye cannae talk, can ye?" Merida asked, earning a shake of the head from the little man, "Sae, how exactly are ye gaein' tae tell me who ye are?"

The little man thought for a moment before snapping his fingers as an idea came to him. Turning to Merida, he swept his hands upwards, causing a stream of sand to rise into the air in front of him. As Merida watched in awe, the little man swept his arms around some more, causing the snow to shift and change in the air and on the ground. After a few moments he stopped and the sand ceased swirling, revealing a classic snowman made out of sand sitting next to him.

"A snowman?" Merida questioned in confusion, "Ah daenae understand."

The little man quickly shook his head and waved his arms before reaching out to the snowman and taking a handful of the sand out of it before letting it run to the ground through his fingers.

"Aye," Merida said with a nod, "It's made o' sand."

The little man nodded his head before making a motion with his hand that urged her on.

"A snowman...made o' sandâ€¦|" Merida thought out loud, "Sae, it's basically â€¦|"

Merida's eyes lit up and she let out a small gasp as her mind put the pieces together.

"A sandman!" Merida exclaimed excitedly, "Ye're th' Sandman! Ye must be th' spirit o' dreams!"

The little man clapped his hands happily as he nodded his head.

"Sae...if ye're th' spirit o' dreams," Merida continued, "Then Ah

must be dreamin', right?"

The Sandman nodded in reply.

"Sae, this is where people come when they're dreamin'?" Merida questioned, earning another nod from the Sandman, "This is really amazing."

Looking back over at Hiccup, she saw he had wandered off a fair distance, prompting another question to enter Merida's head.

"Why didnae ye want me tae touch him?" she inquired as she looked back at the Sandman. In response, the Sandman pointed at her, made a little walking motion with his fingers before pointing at his head.

"Ah wud gae...intae his dreams?" Merida surmised, earning a nod from the Sandman, "Aye, Ah daenae think Ah'm ready fer 'at. Maybe saemeday though?"

The Sandman smiled and shrugged his shoulders as another thought occurred to Merida as a sand dune rolled past.

"This is happenin' because o' whit North did tae me, isnae it?" Merida questioned, "Because Ah'm a magi, Ah can talk tae spirits, which means Ah can be awake while dreamin'?"

The Sandman nodded his head in affirmation.

"Well, Ah'm honored 'at ye're th' first spirit Ah get tae meet," Merida said with a smile, "Besides Jack 'at is."

The Sandman smiled and bowed to her in reply, causing Merida to giggle before giving him a curtsy.

"Sae, whit shud Ah call ye?" Merida questioned, "Ah feel like th' Sandman or th' Spirit o' Dreams is a little too formal, daenae ye think?"

The Sandman nodded in reply as Merida took a moment to think, smiling and snapping her fingers.

"Ah know!" she exclaimed with a smile, "Ah'll call ye Wee Willie Winkie! How's about 'at?"

The Sandman looked at Merida in confusion, narrowing his eyes at her as if he wasn't sure if she was being serious or not before shaking his head. Drawing some sand from up out of the ground, the Sandman quickly used his finger to write a three letter word out of sand that hovered in the air in front of him.

"Ole?" Merida questioned, looking past the floating word at the Sandman, "'At's whit ye like tae be called?"

The Sandman nodded his head in reply.

"Ah thought mine was better," Merida said with a shrug of her shoulders, "Sae, whit else can ye show me?"

In response, Ole shook his head before pointing to his wrist.

"Huh?" Merida questioned in confusion, "What is 'at supposed tae-"

Before Merida could finish, her eyes suddenly opened and she found herself laying in bed with her covers pulled up to her chin. Sitting up, Merida looked around, the light of a new day filtering in through the window. Rubbing her eyes, she felt small lumps in the corner of her eyes. Pulling them out, Merida smiled as she found a few grains of sand sitting in the palm of her hand.

"Wow," Merida whispered in amazement before slipping out of bed. Her feet moving quickly over the cold, wooden floor, Merida made her way out of her room to Hiccup's, opening the door a crack as she peeked inside.

"Hiccup?" Merida said, her voice barely above a whisper, "Ye awake, Hic?"

"Yeah," Hiccup replied groggily, rubbing his eyes as he sat up in bed and looked at her, "What's wrong? Did you sleep alright?"

"Oh, ye hae nae idea," Merida replied with a chuckle as she stepped into his room and closed the door behind her.

A/N: Bit of a shorter chapter this week, but I thought you guys would enjoy these two scenes. Like always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

11. Ice and Fire

Chapter 11: Ice and Fire

Jack Frost chuckled to himself as he skipped across the rooftops of the village of Berk, leaving small trails of frost in his wake. Glancing around, he was happy to find the villagers in better spirits than when he had seen them the day before. The holiday spirit was on the rise and the village was fully decorated for Snoggletog in just a few days time. Sliding to a stop on one of the rooftops and grabbing a chimney for stability, Jack gazed out over the village, one of his hands placed above his eyes to shade them from the morning sun. Spotting what he was looking for, Jack chuckled again before hopping from the rooftop.

Merida and Hiccup made their way down the hill towards the village together, both dressed in their winter clothes with Varis perched on the princess' shoulder.

"So, he couldn't talk at all?" Hiccup questioned.

"Nae at all," Merida replied with a shake of her head, "Ah had tae figure oot whit he meant by th' different gestures he was daein' or th' things he made oot o' th' sand."

"Wow," Hiccup stated with a chuckle, "And you still feel rested?"

"Aye, Ah feel great," Merida replied with a shrug of her shoulders, causing Varis to ruffle his feathers in annoyance, "Honestly, Ah feel

better than Ah did when Ah went tae bed last night. Ah feel ready fer anythin'."

"Good morning!" Jack declared as he suddenly dropped down in front of Hiccup and Merida, causing them both to jump back in surprise. As they did, the two of them lost their footing on the icy, uneven ground, causing them both to fall, Varis flapping his wings and hopping off Merida's shoulder with a loud caw. Before either of them hit the ground, Jack quickly tossed his staff into the air and reached out with both of his hands, grabbing the two by their arms and pulling them upright again.

"Whoa there!" Jack said as let go of Merida and Hiccup's arms before snagging his staff as it fell back down, "Careful, it's a bit slippery out today."

"We gathered," Hiccup replied as he straightened his jacket before adjusting the sword strapped to his back, "Good morning, Jack."

"Morning Pushup," Jack replied as he leaned on his staff.

"It's Hiccup," Merida and Hiccup stated in unison as Varis settled back onto Merida's shoulder.

"You know, you two are adorable when you do that," Jack observed with a grin before eyeing Merida wearily, "You're not going to kick me again, are you?"

"Nae," Merida answered evenly as Varis cawed angrily at him .

"Good because-" Jack began to say before Merida punched him hard on the shoulder, causing the spirit to hiss in pain as he grabbed the sore spot, "Owwww."

"So, what are you up to, Jack?" Hiccup questioned as he smirked at Merida.

"Was about to ask you two the same question," Jack replied as he began rotating his bruised shoulder in an effort to ease the pain, "Where's your little dragon pal? Did you give him that thing?"

"Yeah," Hiccup replied morosely as Merida looked at him sympathetically.

"And?" Jack urged.

"And he left," Hiccup answered, Merida shooting Jack a dirty look, "He left and he hasn't come back."

"Oh man, I'm sorry to-" Jack began to say before Merida punched him in the arm again, causing the spirit to grunt in pain as he glared at her, "Would you stop that!?"

"Ah daenae see why Ah shud," Merida replied as she continued to glare at Jack, Varis cawing and flapping his wings angrily on her shoulder, "It's yer fault Toothless is gone."

"It's not his fault, Mer," Hiccup spoke up as he put a hand on

Merida's shoulder, mollifying her, "Jack may have given me the idea, but it was my decision to build the fin and it was Toothless' choice to leave."

"Ah guess," Merida relented, though she still shot another glare at Jack as the spirit rubbed his sore arm some more.

"Looks like someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed," Jack grumbled as he glared at Merida in turn.

"Actually, Ah slept great," Merida replied with a smug grin, "Even met a relative o' yers."

"Relative?" Jack questioned in confusion before he realized what she meant, "Oh, you mean Sandy."

"Ah believe he prefers Ole," Merida stated.

"Whatever, it's not like I've ever met the guy," Jack replied with a disinterested shrug.

"Ye haenae?" Merida questioned in confusion.

"Sleeping just so happens to be on the list of things that I do not need," Jack answered.

"What do you do with the time?" Hiccup inquired.

"You know...stuff," Jack replied evasively, earning questioning looks from both Hiccup and Merida, "Anyway, like I was asking before, what are you guys up to today?"

"Ah was gaein' tae gae find North an' tell him aboot whit happened tae me last night," Merida answered, "He also mentioned he might hae other things tae teach me taeday."

"Sounds good," Jack replied with a thoughtful nod before turning his attention towards Hiccup, "Maybe I could show you another thing or two today, Catsup."

"It's Hiccup," the young man sighed as Merida rolled her eyes.

"Mhm," Jack replied, clearly not paying attention, "Let's go see if we can find North."

With that Jack turned and shot up into the air, leaving Hiccup and Merida in his dust as he flew over the village.

"Ye know he's jist tryin' tae get a rise oot o' ye, right?" Merida asked as she and Hiccup began to follow Jack on foot.

"Oh, I know," Hiccup replied with a sigh, "What's more annoying is that it's actually working."

After a few minutes of walking, Hiccup and Merida came to the guest house that North was staying at. As they approached, the two saw North standing outside, speaking with Fishlegs as Jack sat on the roof, looking down at them.

"Here you are, North," Fishlegs said as he handed the Rus his neatly folded jacket, "My mom was able to fix most of the damages."

"Eet ees looking good as new!" North exclaimed with a happy laugh as he held the jacket up in order to get a better look at it, "Be telling your mozer zank you for me"

"I will," Fishlegs replied with a smile before he noticed Hiccup and Merida approaching, "Oh, hey guys."

"Hey, Fishlegs," the two of them greeted in unison.

"Oh, that reminds me," Fishlegs said as he pointed at Hiccup, "My mom's working on fixing that coat and shirt you burnt the other day too."

"Tell her thank you," Hiccup replied with a smile.

"Don't thank her yet," Fishlegs said with a laugh, "If you don't figure out how to get a handle on that blessing of yours, you're going to be seeing a lot more of her."

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed with a chuckle, looking down at his burnt hand as he flexed his fingers, "Maybe I should have all my shirts with removeable sleeves from now on."

"Whatever works," Fishlegs stated with a smile as he started to move away from them, "Anyway, I've got some stuff that I need to take care of and I'm betting you guys have plenty to do too, so I'll see you all later."

"See you," Hiccup and Merida said together, waving to Fishlegs as the young man began walking away.

"Eet ees being good to be seeing you up and about, _Printsessa_," North said as he put his coat on, "Are you feeling better zis morning?"

"Aye, much better," Merida replied with a smile, "Saemethin' amazing happened last night."

"I am zinking I am knowing vhat happened," North commented with a chuckle, "You went to ze Dreamlands, did you not?"

"Ah guess if 'at's whit they're called," Merida replied with a nod.

"You met little Ole to, _da_?" North questioned.

"Aye, Ah liked him," Merida answered with a small smile, "He's an odd wee fellow,"

"He vas being one of ze first spirits to be coming eento existence, as old as Pitch Black himself," North explained, "Zere ees much you can be learning from him. You just have to be villing to listen."

"Ah am," Merida stated with a resolute nod, "Tae him an' tae ye."

"You are being eager for another lesson zen, _da_?" North questioned as he laughed and rubbed his hands together excitedly, "Very good, ve veell be getting started right away zen."

Still grinning, North turned to look at Hiccup.

"You are being velcome to come too," North stated, "Zere ees still being much zat I can be teaching you about swordfighting."

"I think you've got enough on your plate with Carrot Top over here, North," Jack spoke up as he hopped from the top of the roof and landed next Hiccup, "Let me show Dollop here a thing or two."

"You, Jack?" North questioned, looking at the spirit suspiciously.

"Yeah, I've picked up some stuff from traveling with you," Jack replied with a shrug, looking away from North as he continued, "Besides, I've already been teaching him a few lessons about controlling his blessing."

"You've vhat!?" North snapped, causing Hiccup and Merida to jump back in surprise, "Jack, are you not remembering vhat happened last time?"

"Of course I remember what happened last time!" Jack snarled, a shocking amount of venom in his voice, the air around him rapidly becoming frigid, "This time is different and you know it. Someone has to teach him, or would you rather have him scorch the entire island!?"

North didn't say anything, his expression softening as he looked at Jack.

"That's what I thought," Jack said with a nod, taking a moment to calm himself before turning his attention towards Hiccup as the air warmed again, "Come on, Buildup. Let's go find someplace where we'll have a little space."

"Sure," Hiccup replied warily, watching as Jack turned around and began walking away, "Right behind you."

Glancing over at Merida, Hiccup saw the redhead giving him a worried look. Hiccup smiled at her, reaching out and giving her hand a quick squeeze before leaving with Jack, trotting to catch up with Jack. Merida watched them go before turning a questioning look towards North.

"Ve should be going as vell, _Printsessa,_" North sighed as he ran a hand over his face, waving a hand at her look, "Zere ees something I am vanting to show you een ze voods."

"Whit's 'at?" Merida inquired.

"That ees being a surprise," North said with a chuckle before gesturing for her to follow him, "Come now, no time to be vasting."

As North started walking away, Merida glanced at Varis with a raised eyebrow, the crow crooking his head towards her before ruffling his

feathers.

"Aye," Merida agreed as she followed North, "My thoughts exactly."

Meanwhile,

"So, you going to tell me what that was all about?" Hiccup questioned as he followed Jack through the woods, ducking under a branch dropping with freshly fallen snow.

"What what was all about?" Jack asked in turn, not looking at Hiccup as he spoke, hopping over an ice covered rock as he walked.

"You know what I'm referring to Jack," Hiccup stated crossly as he stepped around the same rock.

"You're right, I do," Jack said, his light footed walk barely leaving a mark on the snow, "Which is why I also know it's none of your business."

"Really?" Hiccup questioned as he crunched through the snow, his metal foot breaking through the ice and frost like an axe through wood, "Because it sounds like you've trained someone with a blessing before and it went really bad, which also sounds a lot like something that would be my business."

"Fine, Kickup, you want to know so bad, you're going to have to earn it," Jack replied as he stepped into a clearing before turning to face Hiccup.

"And how exactly do I earn it?" Hiccup questioned wearily.

"You have to beat me," Jack replied, spreading his arms out in challenge as he smirked at Hiccup.

"I'm not going to fight you, Jack," Hiccup stated, narrowing his eyes at the spirit as the young man stopped at the edge of the clearing.

"Oh, come now, we're not going to fight," Jack said, waving his hand dismissively at Hiccup, "We're going to spar."

"Yes, because that sounds so much better," Hiccup replied as he rolled his eyes at Jack, "I thought you were supposed to be teaching me something."

"Come on, Trollop, you must have figured this out from North already," Jack grinned as he leaned against his staff, "You don't learn swordplay from watching or talking, you learn it by doing."

"Well, if you're going to teach me something, you seem to be missing something rather necessary," Hiccup observed as he took off his cloak and put it to the side on a nearby rock.

"Oh?" Jack questioned as he took off his cloak as well, "And what's that?"

"A sword," Hiccup said as he drew Bemuhén from the sheath on his

back, the blade reflecting what little sunlight pierced through the overcast day.

"I guess you've got me there," Jack stated with a nod and a smirk. Casually, Jack tossed his staff away, the crook flipping through the air before landing pointing up in the snow. Then, with a flick of his wrist, Jack formed a long, elegantly curved sword made entirely out of ice in his hand.

"Now you're just showing off," Hiccup observed as Jack took a few experimental swings with the sword.

"Oh please," Jack replied with a laugh as he slid into a fighting stance, "I haven't begun to show off yet."

In the blink of an eye, Jack exploded forward, kicking up a cloud of snow in his wake as he rushed at Hiccup. The young man's eyes widened in surprise and he had only a half a second to raise his sword before Jack was on him. Swinging his sword down, Jack's ice blade met Hiccup's metal one with a high pitched clang, leaving the two standing less than a foot away from each other.

"Not bad," Jack observed as he pushed against Hiccup forcing the young man to lean back, "You've got some quick reflexes there, Stickup."

"Thanks," the Viking replied through gritted teeth before turning his blade to the side, causing Jack's sword to slide down Hiccup's, knocking the spirit off balance and forcing him to fall forward. As Jack tried to catch himself, Hiccup raised a knee and buried it into the godling's stomach. Jack let out a cough as he stumbled backwards, holding his stomach in pain.

"And the name's Hiccup," the young man said evenly as Jack caught his breath.

"Alright, I admit," Jack replied breathlessly with a nod as stood back up, "You're a bit better than I thought you'd be."

Jack grinned as he slid back into a fighting stance, prompting Hiccup to do the same.

"Let's kick it up a notch then, shall we?" Jack questioned before launching himself at Hiccup again, kicking up more snow as he rushed the Viking. Again, Hiccup barely had enough time to get his sword up before Jack was raining down a flurry of sword swings on him. The sound of the two blades clashing echoed across the clearing and amongst the trees as Hiccup desperately fended off the attacks Jack was throwing at him, backpedaling all the way.

As Hiccup stumbled away from him, Jack kicked one of his feet at the Viking, knocking a shower of snow directly into the young man's face. As Hiccup stumbled back in surprise, Jack spun around and swung his other foot low, sweeping the Viking's legs and knocking him to the ground. Hiccup grunted in pain as he fell hard on his side before rolling onto his back, only to find Jack standing over him with a grin on his face as he pointed his sword at Hiccup's neck.

"What was that!?" Hiccup demanded as he glared up at Jack, "We're kicking snow at each other now!?"

"Oh come on, Tossup," Jack said condescendingly, "I know you've been in a real fight before. Nothing is off limits, so you best be prepared for it. You either win, or you die and part of that is paying attention to your surroundings."

"I'll keep that in mind," Hiccup sighed before holding his hand out to Jack. Smiling, Jack reached down to take Hiccup's hand and help the young man up. As he grabbed Hiccup's hand though, the Viking suddenly pulled back and planted his good foot against Jack's chest. As he rolled backwards, Hiccup pulled Jack off of his feet before pushing his foot forward, flipping the spirit over him. Using the momentum, Hiccup quickly rolled to his feet before turning towards Jack as the godling landed on the snow covered ground in a heap.

"Nicely done," Jack replied with a pained chuckle, rolling over onto his hands and knees as Hiccup inched towards him, Bemuhén at the ready, "Let me show you some other tricks."

Planting his hands on the ground, Jack swung his body around in a circle, his outstretched legs pinwheeling around him as he spun. As Jack spun, the air around him began to swirl before exploding outwards as the spirit flipped himself back to his feet. The frigid gust of air sent Hiccup sliding backwards, the young man holding his arms up in front of his face to shield it from the biting winds.

Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the wind stopped, allowing Hiccup to lower his arms. As he did, he saw that Jack had completely disappeared. Whipping his head around wildly, Hiccup tried to locate the spirit, his sword at the ready and a confused look on his face. The sound of ethereal laughter caught Hiccup's attention a second before Jack reappeared behind him in a cloud of dancing snowflakes.

As Hiccup turned to face Jack, the Viking found the spirit leaping at him with his foot pulled back for a kick. Swinging his foot low, Jack tried to sweep Hiccup's good leg, which the young man managed to pull back as he turned to face the godling. Using the momentum from the missed kick, Jack spun himself back into the air, flipping around and planting his foot on the ground before swinging his other one around again. This time, Jack aimed for Hiccup's artificial foot and even though the Viking saw the move coming, he found he couldn't pull his prosthetic away in time, allowing the spirit to hook it and knock it into the air, sending the young man tumbling to the ground, his sword sliding from his grasp.

"Seem a little slow with that metal foot of yours," Jack observed as Hiccup caught himself on his hands and knees.

"I wonder why?" Hiccup growled sarcastically as he pushed himself back to his feet, "It's not like I'm missing a limb or anything."

"Why don't you just make yourself a new one?" Jack questioned.

"Excuse me?" Hiccup asked in reply as he stood back up, brushing snow off of his jacket.

"Just make a better one," Jack clarified, "Aren't you supposed to be really good at building stuff?"

"How will that change anything?" Hiccup questioned.

"I don't know," Jack sighed as he threw his hands helplessly into the air, "Maybe you can make one just as good as your old foot. Hel, maybe you can make one that's better."

Hiccup said nothing to Jack's statements, a pensive look on his face.

"The way I see it, you can let it stay a weakness, or you can turn it into a strength," Jack continued with a shrug, "You know what I mean?"

"Yeah," Hiccup answered with a nod, "I think I do."

Reaching down, Hiccup picked Bemuhen back up before turning to face Jack.

"We going to keep going?" Hiccup questioned.

"You don't concede yet?" Jack asked with a grin.

"Hey, I'm the one with something to gain here if I win," Hiccup replied as he slid back into a fighting stance.

"You've certainly got the spirit, Mockup," Jack observed, his grin going larger, "I'll give you that for nothing."

With that, Jack disappeared once more in a swirl of snowflakes, putting Hiccup on edge.

"So here's a new lesson," Jack's voice said as it echoed from all around Hiccup, "How do you hit something you can't see?"

Hiccup looked around tensely for a few moments before a thought occurred to him. He quickly pulled the glove off of his right hand and tossed it aside before rolling his right sleeve up as far as it would go. Clenching his right hand into a fist, Hiccup took a deep breath, closed his eyes and concentrated, causing his fist to burst into flames.

"Oh, he's pulling out the big guns," Jack observed from somewhere unseen, "Let's see what he does with it."

As Hiccup concentrated with his eyes firmly shut, he felt the wind pick up around him as he heard a low whistling noise approaching him. A second later, Hiccup snapped open his eyes just as Jack appeared in the air above him. As Jack descended towards him, Hiccup fell to one knee before slamming his open hand against the ground. As he did, the air around Hiccup rapidly heated and the frost underneath him melted before the ground beneath him seemed to explode, knocking Hiccup off his feet and completely reversing Jack's momentum, sending the spirit flipping through the air before he landed on the other side of the clearing in a heap.

Groaning in pain, Jack blinked his eyes a few times before he managed

to push himself into a seated position. Looking over towards Hiccup, he saw the young man pulling himself to his feet on the other side of a large patch of scorched earth, flames dancing across the once frozen ground. As Hiccup turned to face Jack, the flames seemed to dance around him, with the only marks on him being his singed cloths and a few spots of soot on his face. Hiccup's shaggy hair stuck out in every direction, looking like a fire burning on top of his head, similar to the flames that covered his right arm, his burn glowing bright red.

"Wow," Jack whispered to himself, as he stood up, "Got to admit, pretty cool."

"You okay?" Hiccup questioned, a look of concern on his face.

"Never better!" Jack declared as he brushed himself off and began walking towards Hiccup, "That was pretty impressive!"

"I was just kind of running on instinct," Hiccup replied, looking down at his still burning arm before willing the surrounding fires down.

"This stuff's all about instinct," Jack stated, "More about feeling than it is about thinking. You just got to go with the flow while staying in control."

"Should we keep going?" Hiccup questioned as he looked back towards Jack.

"Of course, I'm not done with you yet, Stirrup," Jack replied with a laugh as he held his arms outstretched in challenge, "Take your best shot."

"What?" Hiccup questioned in confusion.

"Shoot some fire at me," Jack explained.

"I'm not going to shoot fire at you, Jack," Hiccup replied as he narrowed his eyes at the spirit.

"Come on!" Jack insisted.

"No," Hiccup argued adamantly.

"Do it!" Jack urged.

"Jack, I'm not going to-" Hiccup replied crossly.

"Syrup, Syrup," Jack chanted, a grin plastered on his face.

"Jack, I-" Hiccup tried to say.

"Syrup, Syrup," Jack continued, ignoring Hiccup.

"Jack!" Hiccup snapped with a warning tone.

"Syrup, Syrup," Jack went on, not noticing the anger rising up in Hiccup's face.

"That's not my name!" Hiccup shouted as he thrust his hand at Jack,

causing a stream of fire to shoot out at the spirit. Seeing it coming, Jack quickly thrust his own hand out, causing a stream of frigid air to shoot at Hiccup. The two blasts collided at the center of clearing, snowflakes flying, knocking a large cloud of snow flakes into the air as fire and frost swirled together.

"Alright!" Jack shouted enthusiastically, the swirling air stirring his hair and tunic, "Show me what you've got!"

In response, Hiccup gritted his teeth and concentrated harder on the flames, the fire spewing from his hand growing hotter and wilder as he did.

"That's it!" Jack egged Hiccup on, pouring more energy into the icy air shooting from his fingertips, "Push it!"

For a few more moments, Hiccup and Jack struggled against each other, the frost and fire swirling together as they consumed one another. As the elements continued to push against one another, the swirling maelstrom of ice and flames grew larger and larger. After another moment, there came a high pitched whistle, prompting both Jack and Hiccup to stop using their powers as the elements suddenly contracted in on themselves before exploding outwards.

The force of the blast knocked Jack and Hiccup off their feet as the shockwave bent the surrounding trees back like hurricane force winds. A cloud of steam and smoke blanketed the clearing before slowly rising into the air, revealing the clearing was devoid of snow, but dotted with patches of frozen ground while small fires burnt in random places.

Groaning in pain, Jack pushed himself back up to a sitting position and looked at the devastation the two of them had caused.

"Alright," he said with a cough as he watch Hiccup pick himself up as well, "Let's call it a draw."

A/N: This was a lot of fun to write. Not much to say other than how much I enjoyed writing this chapter. And I hoped you all enjoyed reading it! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

12. Original Sin

Chapter 12: Original Sin

Merida followed North as the larger man trudged through the snow covered forest, his boots crunching loudly against the frost. Next to him walked Donner, the reindeer's trot both regal and graceful as it moved through the snow. Glancing upwards, Merida saw Varis following them from above, dodging over, under and around as he flew through the skeletal branches that made up the forest canopy.

"So, what ees being ze story of you and bird?" North questioned as he looked up at Varis as well, slowing down so he and Merida were walking side by side.

"He used tae be Hilde's afore she...passed," Merida explained, watching as Varis flew ahead of them and landed on a branch before

turning back and cawing loudly, "Ah started takin' care o' him afterwards."

"Ah, zat ees making sense," North replied with a sagely nod, "Vhat ees being hees name?"

"Ah ne'er heard whit Hilde called him," Merida admitted with a shrug, "Ah jist call him Varis."

"A fine name for a crow," North observed with a snort of laughter, "I can see you have been making a strong bond veeth heem."

"Whit dae ye mean by 'at?" Merida questioned, turning her attention towards North.

"Ve magi are able to be making strong bonds veeth other creatures, stronger zan a normal person ever could," North explained as he patter Donner on the side, "Vhy you be zeenking zees one follows me around so?"

Donner merely snorted in reply, earning a chuckle from North while a pensive look passed over Merida's features as she digested his words.

"Zees ees not ze first creature you have been bonding veeth, _da_?" North questioned, "Your dragon perhaps?"

"Nae, though Boudica daes hold a special place in ma heart," Merida answered with a shake of her head, "Ah used tae hae a horse named Angus. He was ma closest friend fer years, long afore Ah came tae Berk."

"Vhat happened to him?" North questioned, though he suspected he already knew the answer.

"He protected me when Mor'du an' his Vendal attacked Berk," Merida explained, a far away look in her eyes as she remembered, "Mor'du killed him."

"I am being sorry to hear zat," North stated solemnly, "Ze Demon Bear vas a blight upon ze land. Life ees being better veethout heem."

"Ah'll drink tae 'at," Merida replied with a melancholy chuckle, "Sae, where exactly are ye takin' me?"

"No vhere in particular," North answered as he stopped and looked around at the surrounding forest, "Here ees being a good a place as any."

"A good place fer whit exactly?" Merida questioned, quirking an eyebrow at North.

"Don't be vorrying, you veell be seeing _Printsessa_," North replied with a chuckle as he walked over to a fallen log and brushed some snow off of it before sitting down and beckoning Merida over, "Come, be sitting down veeth me."

Merida looked at North in confusion before walking over and sitting down next to him, Varis flapping down from the branches above them to

settle back down onto her shoulder.

"Okay, Ah'm sittin' doon now," Merida said, crossing her arms and looking at North expectantly.

"Good," North stated with a smile before he reached into his pocket and pulled out something in a paper wrapper, "Now all ve are needing ees zees."

"Whit's 'at?" Merida questioned. cocking her head slightly to the side.

"Our bait," North replied as he unwrapped the item.

"Chocolate?" Merida asked in confusion as she saw the dark brown sweet North was unwrapping, "Whit dae we need chocolate fer?"

"Bait," North repeated as he stood up and walked a few paces away, looking back at Merida as he did. "You must be paying more attention eef you vant to be learning anyzing."

Merida rolled her eyes at North as the Rus set the chocolate down on the ground and quickly backed away from it.

"Zere," North said as he sat back down next to Merida, "Now ve shall be vaiting."

"Waitin' fer whit?" Merida questioned in confused frustration.

"You veell be seeing," North assured her, "For now, you must be patient and still. Eet vould also be helping eef you do not be looking at ze bait."

Merida sighed in annoyance before looking away from the chocolate sitting on the ground, studying some of the bare branches as they swayed in the chilling breeze, prompting her to adjust the knitted hat sitting on her head. For a what seemed like hours, Merida and North sat in silence, the only sound being the ruffle of Varis' feathers and the sound of Donner wandering around the area. Merida was about to say something when another sound caught her attention.

It was a subtle sound at first, so quiet she almost missed it. She heard the sound of branches shifting, twigs snapping and the sound of snow crunching underfoot. Something was moving through the undergrowth and it was coming right towards them. Slowly, Merida turned to look at North, a shocked look on her face. North's only response was to smile at her before bringing his finger up to his lips in a shushing motion.

As the noise grew closer, Merida could also make out the sound of a high-pitched chittering, almost as if something was talking in a language that she didn't understand. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed a bush stir before she saw something walk into view.

As the creature moved into view, Merida did her best not to look directly at it, watching it out of the corner of her eye. It was a tiny creature, not more than a foot tall, looking almost like an

incredibly small person. The little creature had pale features and a bald head, with large brown eyes and long, floppy ears that ended in points. Its head appeared large compared to the rest of its body, which was thin with spindly arms and legs. It wore a make shift tunic that appeared to be made out of leaves and other forest refuse.

As Merida watched, the creature cautiously moved further into view, sniffing the air with its little nose. Eventually, it caught sight of the chocolate sitting not far away, making an excited chittering noise before dashing over to the sweet. Turning her head completely to look at the creature, Merida watched as it took little handfuls of chocolate and greedily shoved them into its mouth.

"North," Merida whispered, her wide eyes remaining locked on the creature in front of her, "Whit is 'at?"

"Zat would be an elf, _Printsessa_," North whispered back, grinning as he watched the creature devour the chocolate.

"An elf!?" Merida whispered harshly as she whipped her head around to look at North, "Elves are real!?"

"Of course zey are being real," North replied as he looked at Merida in confusion, "You vere not zeenking they were?"

"Nae!" Merida whispered loudly, "O' course nae!"

"I mentioned zem een my story," North pointed out, "You vere believing everyzing else but zat?"

"Ah jist thought ye were talkin' oot o' yer arse," Merida replied defensively, an embarrassed blush on her face as she turned to look at the elf again. As Merida watched, the elf wiped bits of chocolate off of his mouth before turning back towards the bushes from which he had come and chattering excitedly as he waved his hands above his head. A few moments later, three more elves emerged from the bushes, each looking similar to the first one and wearing similar makeshift clothes. As Merida watched, they descended gleefully upon the remaining chocolate.

"How hae we ne'er seen them afore?" Merida questioned as she watched the elves feast on the chocolate, "Ah've been through these woods dozens o' times an' ne'er seen any sign o' them."

"Elves are being skittish creatures," North explained, "They are being afraid of anyzing bigger zan zem, wheech ees being pretty much everyzing."

"Sae why did they come oot fer us?" Merida questioned.

"Elves are loving sweets, especially chocolate," North elaborated, "Also, zey are not being very bright, so zey are genuinely zeenking ve are not knowing zey are zere."

Merida contemplated what North had told her as she turned her attention back to the elves, watching as they finished the chocolate and pat their tiny stomachs in satisfaction.

"Whit now?" Merida questioned.

"Now, ve see eef you can be making anozer bond," North stated as he reached into his pocket, retrieved another wrapped piece of chocolate and held it out to Merida.

"Whit dae ye mean?" Merida questioned, giving North a confused look as she took the offered sweet.

"Elves are magical creatures," North explained, "Zey are sharing a connection veeth people like us. I am going to teach you on how to be using zat connection."

Merida looked at North then looked at the chocolate in her hand before nodding.

"Slowly take ze chocolate and offer eet to zem," North instructed, "Do not be making any sudden movements."

Nodding again, Merida carefully unwrapped the chocolate before turning her attention towards the elves, who were sitting on the ground around the discarded wrapper, one of them eagerly licking the remains off of his fingers. Slowly standing up, Merida took a few tentative steps towards the elves, who remained oblivious to her presence.

As she took another step, Merida's foot crunched in the snow, quickly drawing the elves' attentions. The elves' eyes widened in surprise and fear as they found Merida standing over them, a matching look of surprise plastered across her features. For a moment, the elves just stared at Merida with wide eyes before they all began to scream at the top of their little lungs. Merida cringed as she tried to calm the elves but they all began to scatter and run for cover in different directions. As they tried to scramble to safety, one of them slipped on the icy ground and fell onto his side. Taking another step towards him, the elf began to whimper as he curled up into a ball in a vain attempt to protect himself.

"Hush now, it's okay," Merida said soothingly as he lowered herself to her knees, "It's okay, little ane. Ah'm nae gaein' tae hurt ye."

Slowly, Merida brought the chocolate closer to the elf. Taking a few curious sniffs of the air, the elf's whimpers slowly began to fade as he began to uncurl, looking at Merida with his big eyes.

"'At's right," Merida said with an encouraging smile, "It's okay. Come on."

Carefully, the elf pushed himself back to his feet, his eyes trained on Merida as he did so.

"It's alright," Merida assured the elf, "Gae on, hae saeme."

The elf quickly glanced between the chocolate and Merida, taking a few more sniffs as he did so. Hesitantly, the elf reached out towards the chocolate, his eyes trained on Merida the whole time, before he quickly snatched a chunk and stuffed it into his mouth. Merida giggled as she watched the elf eat, seemingly putting the creature at ease, prompting him to grab more chocolate and devour it. Glancing towards the bushes, Merida saw the other elves hesitantly poking their heads out to watch.

"Come on," Merida said, using her free hand to wave them over, "There's plenty fer everyane."

At the same time the first elf turned to the others and waved them over, chattering encouragingly. The elves hesitantly wandered over to Merida and the first elf, and after a few encouraging squeaks from the first elf, they began feasting on the chocolate as well. Merida couldn't help but smile as she watched the elves happily ate the sweets.

"Vell done, _Printsessa,_" North congratulated with a laugh. "Very vell done."

"Thanks," Merida replied as she placed the chocolate on the ground to let the elves eat the rest of the chocolate, brushing off her hands as she stood up, "Sae, whit happens now?"

"You have been making some friends here een ze forest," North explained, "Elves are not being ze smartest creatures, but zey are steell remembering zose who are good to zem. You veell no doubt be learning just how many elves have been living on your island. Among ozer creatures."

"Other creatures?" Merida asked in reply.

"I am zeenking you are knowing ze ozer type of creatures zat are living een zese voods," North stated with a knowing smile.

"Th' wisps," Merida realized, a happy smile spreading across her face.

"I would not be surprised eef you are seeing zem again soon," North explained before standing up and stretching his back, "I am believing eet ees being time for us to be heading back, _da_?"

Merida was about to reply when the sound of a large explosion echoed through the forest, bringing both of their attentions in the direction of the source as the elves screeched and ran for cover. As Merida and North watched, a plume of smoke and steam rose above the treeline into the air. They watched for a moment before the two of them looked at one another.

"I am zeenking ve are both knowing vhat caused zat," North commented.

"Aye, come on," Merida replied before she ran into the forest in the direction the explosion had come from, prompting North and Donner to follow behind as Varis cawed and flew above them.

Meanwhile,

"Does that usually happen?" Hiccup questioned as he stood up and brushed himself off.

"I don't know," Jack admitted, "I've never tried that before."

"So, are you going to tell me?" Hiccup questioned as he smoothed out his hair and eyed Jack.

"Tell you what?" Jack asked in reply as he dismissed his sword and wandered over to where his staff stuck out of the ground.

"You know what, Jack," Hiccup answered with narrowed eyes as he slid his sword back into its scabbard, "We had a deal."

"The deal was that you beat me," Jack stated as he pulled his staff out of the snow, "Like I said, it was a tie."

"Jack," Hiccup pressed with a hint of annoyance in his voice.

"Wow, somebody's feeling pushy today," Jack observed with a sigh, "Alright, Teacup. You want to know so badly, I'll tell you."

Jack wandered over to a nearby rock and sat down on it, prompting Hiccup to walk over and join him.

"So, as you picked up before, you're not the first person with a blessing that I've tried to train," Jack began, a pensive look on his face, "And it didn't exactly turn out that well."

"Who was he?" Hiccup questioned as he sat down next to Jack.

"She," Jack corrected, "Her name was...is Elsa."

"Is?" Hiccup asked with a raised eyebrow, "So, I'm guessing that she's still around. Things can't have gone that bad."

"Trust me, they did," Jack answered, his face an impassive mask.

"What kind of blessing does she have?" Hiccup questioned, "Lightning or something?"

"She...She had an ice blessing," Jack admitted with a sigh, guilt breaking through his features.

"Ice?" Hiccup questioned in confusion, "How did she get an ice blessing?"

"I gave it to her," Jack explained, a sad look in his eye as he turned his attention towards the ground.

"You...gave it to her?" Hiccup questioned, "Jack...why would you?"

"Maybe I should start from the beginning," Jack interrupted, "I was born coming up on twenty one years ago in a land just south of here, near Arendelle. I wasn't born like someone like you. I was born as you see me just...a little less experienced."

"Do you...remember anything about your birth?" Hiccup asked, a concerned look on his face.

"Only bits and pieces," Jack answered with a sigh, shaking his head, "There was darkness...and a woman was crying...then I was in some ancient ruin. The first thing I remember seeing was a crescent moon shining through a hole in the ceiling."

"There was no one there with you?" Hiccup questioned.

"No, I was alone," Jack answered with a shake of his head, "At least until North found me there."

"Why was North there?" Hiccup inquired.

"I don't know. I don't think he knows," Jack replied with a shrug, "He just said the spirits told him he needed to be there."

"You've never been able to find out anything more about where you come from?" Hiccup asked.

"Nothing," Jack answered sadly before shaking his head again, "Anyway, you didn't want to hear my sob story. After he found me, North brought me to where he was living on the outskirts of Arendelle with a group of trolls. He was trying to teach me what I needed to know but he didn't understand how restless I could be yet."

"So you wandered off," Hiccup surmised.

"Yep, after North went to sleep, I snuck out, only about a month after I was born," Jack elaborated, "I went wandering and eventually ended up in the capital further south. So many people, so many buildings. I'd never seen anything like it. Especially not the castle."

A small smile spread across Jack's face.

"I spent some time exploring the castle," Jack went on, "Everyone was already asleep, so no really saw me. Eventually, I decided to take a peek inside and found an open window. I'm not really sure why the window was open, it was late in winter, not that I really understood that back then. Anyway, I went in and that's when I found her."

"Elsa? She lived in the castle?" Hiccup questioned, "That long ago she would have been just a baby."

"A baby," Jack finished with a nod, "She was in her parents room, in a crib near the window. I had never seen a baby before, so I went in to get a closer look. I must have woken her up because she was looking up at me when I looked into the crib. She seemed...scared and she was starting to cry."

"What did you do?" Hiccup asked.

"I tried to figure out a way to calm her down," Jack explained, his smile falling, "I was just learning how to control my own powers, but my first instinct was to create some little snowflakes to dance in front of her. It worked and she started to calm down. I thought she was going to fall asleep again so I reached down to stroke her head but,,,"

"But what?" Hiccup answered, a small sense of dread filling his chest.

"The magic...it must have still been in my hands," Jack explained, flexing his hand as he thought, "So when I touched her..."

"It went into her," Hiccup finished, a look of realization on his face, "You blessed her by accident."

"I had no idea what was happening until it was too late," Jack continued, pulling his knees up to his chest and wrapping his arms around them, "Her hair was blonde before, but it got lighter as the magic went into her, so light it almost became white like mine. She must not have enjoyed the feeling because she started to cry and shriek, which woke up her parents. Her mother screamed and her father started to yell. So, I ran."

"What happened after that?" Hiccup questioned, "I'm sure you didn't just leave her like that."

"No," Jack answered with a shake of his head, "First I went back to North and the trolls and explained everything that had happened. North was quick to understand what I had done, including the fact that there was no taking it back. So, he decided to do the next best thing and we went back to explain what happened."

"How did that go?" Hiccup inquired.

"Pretty bad," Jack admitted with a cringe, "Turns out her dad is the king of Arendelle."

"The king!?" Hiccup asked in shock, "Elsa is a princess?"

"Yep, and I had just accidentally granted her magical powers," Jack continued, "The king wanted my head, but North was able to talk him down, mostly by appealing to the queen. There was no way for me to take the power back, or at least if there is I haven't found it yet. So the only real solution was for me, North and even the trolls to help her use them as she grew older. We got the king to reluctantly agree and so Arendelle basically became my home for the next couple of years."

"Years?" Hiccup questioned in surprise, "Sounds like things went pretty well actually."

"It did for awhile," Jack agreed with a nod, a small grin returning to his face, "Elsa and I bonded as she grew older. I know it sounds stupid to say about someone who was so young, but she was my best friend. Her powers weren't very strong at first, they seemed to grow as she grew older. It made it easier for her to control her powers as we learned how to use them together. Three years later, she had a little sister, Anna. Things were going great."

"And then they weren't," Hiccup guessed.

"And then they weren't," Jack agreed, his smile falling, "It happened around fifteen years ago, when Elsa was six and Anna was three. It was a night like any other. I wasn't sleeping, like usual and decided to check in on the two of them. I must have woken Anna, though she claimed it was the Northern lights. It didn't take long for her to get Elsa up and we all decided to play in the throne room."

Jack suddenly went quiet, his eyes clouded with memory as he stared down at the ground in front of him.

"What happened, Jack?" Hiccup pushed gently.

"Elsa was playing with Anna," Jack explained, an edge in his voice, "She was creating a bunch of ice towers that Anna was jumping between. Eventually, Anna got reckless and started jumping before Elsa created the towers, trusting her sister to catch. She kept going fast and faster untilâ€¦"

Jack paused as he sighed as he closed his eyes in pain.

"Elsa accidentally hit Anna in the head with a blast of magic," Jack went on, his voice barely above a whisper, "Anna fell to the floor, out cold, and a white streak formed in her hair. Everything after that happened so fast. The king, the queen and North were woken and we all rushed to see the trolls for help. The leader of the trolls was able to figure out what had happened. Elsa's magic was seeping into Anna's mind and was threatening to freeze it solid. He was able to remove the magic, but not without damaging her memories. She's lucky to be alive."

"I'm guessing the king didn't take kindly to any of this," Hiccup observed, "Did he try to execute you? Banish you?"

"No, though I'm sure he wanted to," Jack answered, lowering his head as he continued to talk, "After we got everyone back to the castle, Elsa locked herself in her room and refused to talk to anyone. I was able to get into her room and tried to comfort her Elsa wasn't having any of it. She said it was her fault that Anna almost died and she kept calling herself a horrible person. Eventually it got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore and I...I said something I shouldn't have."

"What?" Hiccup questioned on the edge of his seat.

"We had never told Elsa where her powers had come from," Jack explained, taking his staff in both hands, "I couldn't watch her beat herself up like that, so I told her what I had done. Told her that it was my fault. After a few moments of shock, she agreed with me."

"Jack," Hiccup began to say but was cut off as Jack continued his story.

"She told me that she hated me," Jack went on with a small sniffle, "She told me that everything that had happened was my fault. She told me that she wished she had never met me. She said that she wanted me to go and that she never wanted to see me again."

Jack tightened the grip on his staff, holding it so tight that his knuckles began to turn white.

"So, I obliged her," Jack continued, a hitch in his voice as he spoke, "I left and I never looked back. North caught up with me awhile later and the two of us have been wandering ever since."

Jack let out another long, raggid sigh before chuckling as he quickly rubbed his eyes with the palm of one of his hands.

"There you go, Bishop," Jack said with a strained voice, "You wanted my story and now you've heard it. Now, you understand why I didn't want to do this initially. Now, you see why North was so hesitant. He

gave up a lot to come with me. More than you'll probably ever know."

"Jack, I-" Hiccup began to say, uncertainty written on his face.

"Anyway, I think that's enough lessons for one day," Jack interrupted as he stood up and began walking away, "I'm sure you know the way back to the village. I'll see you later."

"Jack, wait!" Hiccup said as he quickly stood up and tried to follow the spirit.

"Hope you enjoyed the story," Jack continued, not looking back at Hiccup as he approached the forest's edge. Just as he did, Merida came running out, almost crashing into him.

"Jack!" Merida called in surprise as she skidded to a halt, "Whit's gaein' on? Whitâ€™?"

Merida trailed off as she looked at Jack in confusion.

"Is everythin'â€™" Merida began to say, her confusion replaced with concern.

"Everything's fine, Carrot Top," Jack cut Merida off as he pushed past her, "Ask your boyfriend if you want the whole story, I've got places to be."

Before Merida could say anything else, Jack leapt into the forest canopy and disappear. A second later, Hiccup ran up, looking in the direction Jack had gone in. After a moment, Merida turned to look at Hiccup in confusion.

"Hiccup, whit's gaein' on? Whit happened?" Merida questioned, a worried look on her face, "An' why was Jack cryin'?"

A/N: So, a lot of people guessed one part of the reveal of this chapter, though I don't think anyone saw the other part. Hope you guys enjoyed this one, it was pretty fun to write. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome so please review! Later!

13. Mr Sandman

Chapter 13: Mr. Sandman

A fire crackled in the fireplace of the home Hiccup and Merida shared with Stoick. The two of them sat before the fire, cuddled up as they spoke quietly to one another.

"Ah cannae believe it," Merida whispered in shock as she tried to process what Hiccup had just told her.

"I know," Hiccup agreed with a slight shake of his head, "I can't believe all of that happened to Jack."

"Whit?" Merida asked in confusion before shaking her head, "Nae, 'at's nae whit Ah'm talkin' aboot, Hic. Daenae ye know who Elsa

is?"

"The Princess of Arendelle?" Hiccup answered uncertainly.

"Th' soon tae be Queen o' Arendelle," Merida corrected.

"Well, yeah, Mer," Hiccup stated, giving Merida a confused look, "I know what a princess is."

"'At's nae whit Ah mean," Merida stated with a sigh, "Elsa's parents...th' King an' Queen o' Arendelle...they're dead."

"Oh...so Elsa's the queen now?" Hiccup questioned, a sad look on his face.

"Soon tae be queen," Merida repeated, "She had tae wait until she was twenty-ane tae be coronated, which she will be this comin' year."

"How do you know all of this?" Hiccup questioned.

"Elsa is Rapunzel's cousin," Merida explained, "She explained this all tae me when Ah visited her awhile back."

"I see," Hiccup stated before a thought occurred to him, "Does Rapunzel know about all this?"

"Ah...Ah daenae know," Merida admitted, "Ah daenae think sae, or if she daes, she didnae let me in on it."

"This all just keeps getting more and more complicated," Hiccup sighed.

"Tell me aboot it," Merida agreed as she leaned her head on his shoulder, "Ah'm jist thankful 'at ye're here tae help me through it."

"Don't know what I'd do without you," Hiccup replied as he leaned down and captured Merida's lips in a quick kiss. As he began to pull away, Merida quickly reached up and grabbed the back of Hiccup's head before pulling him back and crashing her lips hungrily against his. For a few moments, the two of them did nothing but move their lips against one another. Suddenly, Hiccup's eyes shot open in surprise as he felt something slip into his mouth. He abruptly pulled away from Merida, the two of them looking at each other with wide eyes.

"What was that?" Hiccup questioned.

"Did...Did ye nae like it?" Merida questioned, an embarrassed blush crossing her face, as she looked away from him, "Ah'm sorry, Ah-Ah've jist heard aboot it afore an'â€¦"

"Hey, it's okay," Hiccup said with a chuckle, "I'm not upset and I didn't say...I didn't like it."

"Oh?" Merida questioned, a small smile on her face as she looked back at Hiccup, "Ah mean, Ah'm pretty inexperienced with this sort o' thin' sae Ah was worried Ah was...daein' it wrong."

"N-No, you were...you were great," Hiccup replied, blushing as he

scratched the back of his head and averted his eyes, "I was just...surprised. I've never heard of anything like that before."

"Saemetimes Ah ferget how isolated Berk really is," Merida stated as she reached out and began rubbing his chest with her fingers, causing the blush on Hiccup's face to deepen, "It's called a Coronian Kiss. It's supposed tae be a little bit more...intimate."

"Did Rapunzel teach you that too?" Hiccup blurted out before a horrified look crossed his face as he realized what he had said. In reply, Merida pulled back slightly as she crooked an eyebrow at Hiccup.

"My... 'at was cheeky wasnae it?" Merida questioned before she leaned in close to Hiccup, looking at him with half-lidded eyes, "Wud ye like tae see 'at?"

"I...Iâ€¦" Hiccup mumbled, fumbling for words as he grew more and more flustered due to the images that Merida was planting in his head.

"She's awfully far away though," Merida continued, tapping her lip with her finger thoughtfully, "Maybe Astrid wud be interested. Wud ye an' Fishlegs like 'at?"

Hiccup said nothing, looking at Merida with wide eyes as his entire face turned red.

"Ye're far too easy tae tease, Hic," Merida observed with a giggle before leaning forward and kissing Hiccup on the neck, sending a chill through the young man's body, "It's a good thin' too because ye're utterly adorable when ye're flustered."

Pulling back, Merida yawned as she stretched her arms above her head and ran a hand through her red hair.

"Anyway, Ah think 'at has been enough excitement fer ane night," Merida said as Hiccup recomposed himself.

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed, covering his mouth as he yawned as well.

"Ye know, ye're gaein' tae hae tae get used tae this sort o' stuff, Hic," Merida said as she stood up before leaning down over Hiccup, "Who knows whit mischief we'll get up tae ance we're married?"

The question shocked Hiccup into complete silence as he blushed brightly again, causing Merida to laugh in amusement.

"Come on, love," Merida said as she reached down and took Hiccup's hands before pulling him to his feet, "Off tae bed with ye."

Hiccup offered no resistance as he stood up and followed Merida upstairs, his hand clenched in hers as they went. Stopping outside of his bedroom, Merida quickly spun around and pulled Hiccup into another kiss, briefly slipping her tongue into his mouth before pulling away again, both of their faces flushed.

"Love ye," Merida whispered as she hugged Hiccup, resting her head against his shoulder.

"Love you too," Hiccup replied as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head, enjoying the smell of her as it filled his nose.

"Night," Merida said as she pulled back and gave Hiccup another quick peck on the lips, earning a smile from the Viking.

"Night," Hiccup replied as Merida began walking towards her room, their hands clasped together until the space between them forced them to let go and they each stepped into their respective rooms.

Closing her door behind her, Merida sighed happily as she leaned against the door and rested her head against it, smiling contently to herself. Pushing herself off the door, Merida quickly got changed and crawled into bed, falling asleep as she pulled her blanket over her and rested her head against the pillow.

Just as she fell asleep, she felt her surroundings suddenly shift. Opening her eyes, she found herself standing in the constantly shifting desert of the Dreamlands.

"Ah'm starting tae wonder if this is gaein' tae be a recurrin' thin'," Merida questioned as she looked around at the Dreamlands in wonder. As she did, she felt something tug on her arm, pulling her attention downwards, where she found the Sandman looking up at her, giving her a little wave as she noticed him.

"Ole!" Merida said happily as she turned to face him, "It's good tae see ye again!"

Ole nodded as he smiled at Merida.

"Did ye brin' me here?" Merida questioned, "Or is this jist gaein' tae happen every time Ah fall asleep?"

Ole shrugged and wiggled his hand from side to side as he made a face that made it seemed like he was having a trouble explaining what he meant.

"Sort o'?" Merida questioned, raising an eyebrow at the spirit, "Sae, Ah'm guessin' this is saemesort o' skill 'at Ah hae tae learn how tae master."

Ole nodded in reply, a smile on his face.

"Can ye help me with 'at?" Merida questioned.

Ole nodded his head again, bringing a smile to Merida's face.

"Where dae we start?" Merida asked.

Ole urged Merida to follow him as he began walking away, prompting the princess to walk with the spirit as they made their way across the rolling sand dunes. As they walked, Merida looked around at her surroundings. She saw numerous people wandering around the desert in the same daze she had seen Hiccup in the night before. Some of the people were close by, but through space between the rolling dunes, Merida could make out figures standing far off in the distance.

"Ole," Merida said, a look of awe on her face, "How big is this place?"

Ole's response was to hold his hands out as far apart as his arms would allow them.

"Big," Merida stated with a nod as she continued to look out at the figures far in the distance, "Got it."

The sound of snapping fingers brought Merida's attention back towards Ole as they walked down a sand dune. Turning her head back towards him, Merida saw Ole pointing at something. Following the direction that he was pointing, Merida was surprised when she saw an elf wandering around nearby.

"Ah guess elves need sleep jist like everyane else," Merida observed with a chuckle before turning her attention back towards Ole, "Whit dae we need him fer?"

Ole pointed at Merida before placing his hand against his chest and then pointing at the elf.

"Ye want me tae touch him?" Merida asked in confusion, "Last time Ah was here ye told me Ah shuldnae touch people."

Ole shook his head and waved his hands before motioning towards the elf again.

"Alright, alright," Merida replied as she began walking towards the elf, "Ye're th' boss around here."

Standing over the elf, Merida watched as the small creature slowly wandered past her, its eyes closed and its breathing slow. Merida hesitantly reached out, pausing before she extended her finger and poked the elf in between its eyes. As she did, she suddenly felt as if she was falling as everything seemed to spin around her. Gasping in surprise, Merida clenched her eyes closed as she fell and spun. Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the sensation stopped and Merida felt herself standing on firm ground once more.

Slowly opening her eyes, Merida found that all of her surroundings had completely changed once more. She stood in the middle of an expansive plane made of chunky, brown rocks. A bright sun hung in the blue sky above, the light of the sky contrasting with the dark colors of the ground.

"Whit th'â€¦" Merida began to say before she heard the sound of familiar chattering from behind her. Turning around, she found that she was standing in the shadow of a large mountain made out of the same large, brown rocks. All around the base of the mountain, elves were scurrying in every direction.

As she watched, she saw some elves break off chunks from the surrounding rocks and stuff them into their mouths. A confused look on her face, Merida leaned down and ran her finger over one of the rocks, looking at it in surprise as it left a residue on her finger. After looking at it for a moment, Merida hesitantly stuck her finger in her mouth and licked the residue off.

"Chocolate?" Merida questioned in confusion as pulled her finger out and stood back up before she began walking closer to the mountain, watching the elves as they happily danced around and greedily ate the endless supply of chocolate that surrounded them. As she looked around, she felt a tug on her arm before she looked down and found Ole standing next to her again.

"Whit's gaein' on, Ole?" Merida questioned in confusion, "Where are we?"

Ole responded by pointing at his head.

"Are we...are we in th' elf's dream?" Merida asked in shock, earning a nod from Ole.

"Ah can enter other people's dreams?" Merida questioned in surprise, "Nae wonder ye didnae want me touchin' anyone afore. This elf must hae been ane o' th' anes Ah fed chocolate taeday."

As Merida spoke with Ole, the sound of the elves chattering caught her attention. Turning to look, Merida saw the elves had started gathering around the base of the mountain. As she looked, she saw a figure come into view a bit higher up on the mountain. As the person walked out onto a ledge, Merida was able to get a better look at the figure.

The person was a young woman, roughly the same age as Merida herself and slightly taller. She had long, wavy red hair that hung down to the small of her back, pale features and bright blue eyes. She wore an immaculate white dress that clung tightly to her curves and left her shoulders bare.

"My children!" the woman called out in a clear voice, "Feast upon my gifts and no that I shall never forsake you!"

"Oh, ye've got tae be kiddin' me," Merida groaned as she watched the the young woman with a look of slight disgust, "'At's supposed tae be me, isn't it?"

Ole shrugged in reply as he gave Merida a bemused smile.

"Maybe we shuld get oot o' here," Merida said as she glanced back at her dream doppelganger who was giggling happily down at the elves, "Afore thin's get any weirder than they already hae,"

Ole nodded in agreement before he pinched himself, causing him to disappear in a puff of sand.

"Really?" Merida questioned skeptically, "'At's it?"

Reaching up, Merida pinched her arm, causing everything to fade away before she abruptly found herself sitting up in her bed. Looking around, Merida saw that the early morning sun was filtering in through her window and she could hear the sound of Stoick moving around downstairs. Hissing in pain, Merida reached up and touched her arm, the spot where she had pinched herself in the Dreamlands still sore.

"Aye," she said as she rubbed the spot on her arm before she pushed her blanket off and began her day, "'At's gaein' tae take saeme

gettin' used tae."

A/N: Really short chapter this week, still it was a fun one. Hope you guys liked it as well. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

14. Carried Away

Chapter 14: Carried Away

As Merida made her way down the stairs, she yawned as she stretched her arms above her head. Glancing into the kitchen, she could see Stoick making himself some breakfast.

"Mornin', Stoick," she greeted, prompting the chief to glance over his shoulder at her.

"Oh, good mornin', Merida," Stoick replied, "Eggs?"

"Love saeme," Merida answered as she sat down at the small wooden table in the kitchen.

"Hiccup up yet?" Stoick questioned as he glanced over his shoulder at Merida.

"Nae yet," Merida replied.

"Good," Stoick replied as he turned towards Merida and scrapped some eggs onto the wooden plate in front of Merida, "That means I can talk to you."

Merida gave Stoick a confused look as the chief sat down across from her at the table.

"A lot has been happenin' over the last few days," Stoick explained as he placed his own plate on the table in front of him, "A god has appeared on our shores, our dragons have all fled for gods know what reason, all on the eve of Snoggletog."

"It's been pretty crazy," Merida agreed with a nod as she took a bite of her eggs.

"It has been, and we've all been runnin' around so much that I haven't been able to keep tabs on everythin'," Stoick stated as he looked Merida in the eye, "Especially you."

"Whit dae ye mean?" Merida asked in surprise.

"I mean I know somethin' has been goin' on with you and this...North character," Stoick explained, "I wanted to check in on you and make sure everythin' is alright."

"Really?" Merida questioned, a smile crossing her face as Stoick nodded his head, "Thank ye, Stoick. 'At's very thoughtful o' ye."

"I'd like to think I've changed since you came to live with us," Stoick said as he took another bite of his eggs, "Includin' understandin' I need to be more aware of how those I care about are

feelin'."

"Ye care about me?" Merida teased as she quirked an eyebrow at Stoick.

"That I do," Stoick answered with a smirk, "You're goin' to marry my son come the spring and that makes you as much my daughter as anyone's."

"Thank ye, Stoick," Merida stated with a genuine smile, to which Stoick responded with a snort and a dismissive wave of his hand as he took another bite of his breakfast.

"So, out with it now," Stoick insisted, "What have you been doin' with this North fellow?"

"Ah'm nae sure ye'll believe me when Ah tell ye," Merida answered with a chuckle.

"I've seen a lot of things I wouldn't believe this past year," Stoick countered with a smirk, "I think you'll find me a little more open to the strange now days."

Merida smiled and nodded in reply before she began to go over what had been happening the past few days. Stoick listened intently as he continued to eat his breakfast, nodding his head every once in awhile to show he was paying attention. After a few minutes, Merida was finished and Stoick took a few silent moments to think over what she had told him, quietly eating his breakfast as he thought.

"So, you're one of these...magi now?" Stoick questioned.

"Always was, as it were," Merida replied with an awkward smile and a shrug, "Ah hope this daesnae complicate thin's."

"Of course not," Stoick answered with a snort, "If you tryin' to kill Hiccup when you first met him didn't stop all this, you bein' able to do a few magic tricks won't either."

Merida could only smile in reply as she blushed and scratched the back of her neck while averting her eyes in embarrassment.

"So, you mentioned...elves in our woods?" Stoick questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"Aye," Merida replied with a nod and a small chuckle.

"Are they...somethin' we should be concerned about?" Stoick asked.

"Ah daenae think sae," Merida replied with a shake of her head, "Ah daenae know much about them yet, but they seem pretty harmless."

"That's good to hear," Stoick sighed as he leaned back in his chair, "The last thing I need is an elf army descendin' upon us."

Merida snorted in laughter at the image as Stoick pushed himself away from the table and stood up.

"Well, better get the day started," Stoick sighed as he picked up his plate and put it away, "Have to repair some of the shingles on the roof."

"'At'll probably wake Hiccup up," Merida commented as she put her plate away as well.

"Just as well," Stoick replied, picking up a tool box as he made his way towards the door, "It's around the time he wakes up anyway."

Nodding, Merida watched as Stoick left the house before she went back to cleaning up after herself. As she did, she heard Stoick begin to work on the roof, the sound of his hammer knocking against the shingles echoing through the house. A few moments later, Merida heard a commotion from above her before Hiccup came bounding down the stairs.

"Toothless!" Merida heard Hiccup exclaim as he rushed past her towards the door.

"Whit?" Merida questioned in confusion, turning towards the door as Hiccup reached it before realization struck her, "Hiccup, nae! Wait!"

"I knew you'd come back!" Hiccup exclaimed happily as he rushed out the door before Merida could stop him and went racing around to the side of the house. As he rounded the corner, he ran onto a patch of his ice, his momentum carrying his legs out from underneath him and sending him sprawling across the frozen ground with a grunt of pain.

Hearing the commotion from below, Stoick looked up from his work, smiling as he saw Hiccup laying on the ground, as Merida rushed over to his side.

"Mornin', son!" Stoick greeted with a smile as Merida kneeled down next to Hiccup, "Take a bit of a spill, did you?"

"Oh, hey Dad" Hiccup grunted as Merida helped him up into a sitting position as Stoick used a ladder to make his way down off of the roof, "I guess I did."

"Ye okay?" Merida asked in concern.

"Yeah, I think so," Hiccup replied as he stood back up with Merida's help, "Just got a little too excited, I guess."

"I'm glad you're up," Stoick said as he walked over to Hiccup and Merida, "I was lookin' for your helmet."

"Helmet?" Merida questioned, cocking an eyebrow at Stoick "Why do ye need his helmet?"

"Because Odin needs a place to put his goodies," Stoick explained with a smile.

"...Excuse me?" Merida asked, even more confused then before.

"It's a belief with Snoggletog," Stoick explained with a smirk, "The

story goes that the night before Snoggletog, Odin flies around and visits all the Viking homes and leaves goodies for all the good girls and boys in their helmets. I guess we'll have to get you one too,"

"Right," Hiccup sighed sadly as he turned and began walking away, "I'll go see if I can find her one."

As Hiccup left, Stoick and Merida shared a worried glance.

"Hold on," Stoick spoke up as he walked over to Hiccup as the young man turned to face him, "Alright, come on. What's on your mind? Out with it."

"It's been a few days, Dad," Hiccup answered with another sigh, "...I just thought Toothless would be back by now."

"Ah'm sure he's with th' other dragons," Merida said reassuringly as she reached out and touched Hiccup's arm.

"Yeah?" Hiccup questioned as he turned to look at her, "I wish I could be that sure."

"Listen," Stoick stated with a sigh, bringing Hiccup's attention back to him, "I know what it's like to miss someone you love this time of year, but what do we do when they can't be here for the holiday?"

"We celebrate them," Stoick continued as he reached down and put a hand on Hiccup's shoulder, "I imagine that's exactly what Toothless would want you to do. Right?"

"You're right," Hiccup agreed with a sigh and a nod.

"Good," Stoick said as he gave Hiccup a fatherly pat on the arm, almost knocking the young man over in the process, before he turned around and began making his way back up the ladder, "Now, go find Merida that helmet. We need a little more cheer around these parts."

Hiccup winced in pain as he stretched his arm before turning towards Merida and giving her a small smile.

"How about we take a run down to the smithy and find you a helmet?" Hiccup suggested, "It's about time we get you one, I think."

"Sounds good," Merida replied as she reached out and took Hiccup's hand, shivering slightly at the cold, "We shud probably dress a little warmer though, daenae ye think?"

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed, just becoming aware of how cold he actually was, "Good idea."

"Speakin' o' th' cold, any word from Jack?" Merida questioned as they made their way inside back and began getting dressed in their winter clothes.

"Not since he left the other day," Hiccup replied, shaking his head with a sigh as he pulled on his cloak, "You think he's okay?"

"Ah mean, Ah'm sure he's fine," Merida stated with a shrug as she pulled her hat on, "He's a powerful spirit. He can take care o' himself."

"That's not what I was refering too, Mer," Hiccup said as they both stepped outside.

"Ah...Ah know," Merida replied with a sigh as they began making their way down the hill towards the village center, "Ah daenae know whit tae tell ye, Hic. Yer talk with Jack obviously brought up saeme bad memories. He probably jist needs time tae sort oot his thoughts. He'll be back, ye'll see."

"I hope," Hiccup stated with a sigh, "I'm getting a little tired of people leaving."

"Hey," Merida said as she reached out and took Hiccup's hand in hers, as they reached the center of the village, "Ah'm nae gaein' anywhere."

"You had better not," Hiccup replied, smiling and giving her hand a squeeze.

Turning a corner towards the smithy, the two of them were caught off guard as they smacked into Fishlegs, who was carrying a wicker basket that was full of fish.

"Oh sorry, guys," Fishlegs apologized as he adjusted his grip on the basket, "I didn't see you there."

"Nae worries, Fish," Merida replied as she and Hiccup caught themselves, "Nae harm done."

"You must be pretty hungry there, Fishlegs," Hiccup commented with a smirk as he nodded at the basket, "There's enough fish in there to feed a dragon."

"Oh...yeah," Fishlegs replied with an incredibly awkward laugh, "...a dragon."

Merida and Hiccup glanced at one another before they looked at Fishlegs suspiciously.

"Okay Fish," Merida said as she placed her hands on her hips, "Oot with it."

"O-Out with what?" Fishlegs questioned nervously.

"We know you're hiding something, bud," Hiccup replied with a chuckle, "You might as well tell us."

Fishlegs glanced nervously between Hiccup and Merida before sighing as his shoulders drooped in defeat.

"So, you guys know how all the dragons left?" Fishlegs questioned as he looked away from the others nervously.

"Yeah, I think I heard about it," Hiccup replied sarcastically.

"Well, it might be that notâ€|all of them left," Fishlegs continued.

Merida and Hiccup glanced at each other with matching confused looks before turning their attention back towards Fishlegs.

"Fishlegs," Merida said evenly, "Where's Meatlug?"

"I may have trapped him in my dad's boatshed," Fishlegs replied awkwardly.

"You what!?" Hiccup exclaimed in surprise.

"It's not like he's using it right now," Fishlegs argued weakly.

"'At's nae whit we're upset aboot, Fish!" Merida shouted as she threw her hands up into the air, "We're upset 'at ye've been keepin' this from us."

"Yeah, Fishlegs, what's the deal?" Hiccup questioned.

"Look, it took a lot of effort to get Meatlug in the shed," Fishlegs explained, "He fought me the whole way and I had to chain him up. I was worried that drawing attention to it might let him get away."

"Ye sure 'at's a good idea?" Merida questioned, "We're still nae sure 'at th' dragons leavin' was a bad thing."

"We don't know it was a good thing either," Fishlegs countered.

"Fair enough," Hiccup relented, "You mind if we come with you while you feed him?"

"Sure," Fishlegs agreed before motioning for the two of them to follow him. Following Fishlegs, the three of them made their way down to the docks, stopping in front of a large shed right on the edge of the docks.

"He's in here," Fishlegs explained as they approached the door, "Now, we have to be careful. He gets a little jumpy when the door opens."

"Ah wonder why?" Merida replied sarcastically as Fishlegs placed the basket of fish on the ground.

"You know, I think you're rubbing off on her," Fishlegs commented as he glanced at Hiccup, who merely shrugged and smiled in reply.

Walking up to the front of the door, Fishlegs grabbed one and slowly began to pull it open a crack.

"Hey, buddy," Fishlegs greeted as he stuck his head in through the doors, "How's it going?"

The sound of a low grunt followed by the sound of something heavy moving about and the clanking of chains.

"Got some fish for you," Fishlegs continued as he reached into the basket and pulled out a fish before holding it up so Meatlug could see, "See?"

Hiccup and Merida could hear the sound of Meatlug sniffing the air through the door.

"Yeah, I know how much you like fish," Fishlegs stated before tossing the fish into the corner of the room, "Go get it!"

Next came the sound of claws scraping against wood and clanking chains as Fishlegs pulled his head back out of the door and signaled for Hiccup and Merida to enter with him. Pulling the door open just enough to let the three of them in, Fishlegs pulled the basket of fish in as well before closing the door behind them, not noticing the latch failing to click closed.

The shed was much as Hiccup remembered in, large and filled with the odds and ends needed for building ships. Near the center of the shed was a pillar that supported the ceiling, a large pile of hay laid around it. Chained to the pillar, nestled in the hay and feeding on a fish, was Meatlug.

"Ye really chained him up?" Merida questioned as she looked at Meatlug.

"It was the only way to get him to stay," Fishlegs explained as he sat the basket of fish down next to Meatlug and overturned it, spilling the fish across the ground, which the dragon began to eat hungrily.

"Where did you get the chain?" Hiccup questioned as he walked up next to Meatlug to have a better look at the item in question.

"I...uh...found it by the smithy," Fishlegs replied nervously, not noticing as the door creaked open behind them.

"You didn't happen to find it behind the shop, did you?" Hiccup questioned as he eyed Fishlegs as Meatlug finished his meal.

"Yeah, why?" Fishlegs questioned.

"Because if so, then this chain is defective," Hiccup explained, as Meatlug took a few sniffs of the air, "It's rusted through in some parts. I was going to melt it down for scrap."

"Sae, ye're sayin'â€|" Merida began to say as Meatlug stood up and eyed the door.

"If he tried, Meatlug could break this easily," Hiccup explained as he stood back up.

As Hiccup spoke, Meatlug suddenly lurched forwards, his tiny wings buzzing furiously as he lifted off the ground, slamming into Hiccup as he went. Before any of them could react, Meatlug went flying at the door, lurching for a second as the chain around his neck caught him. As the full force of Meatlug's momentum shook the chain, it snapped, forcing Fishlegs and Merida to duck out of the way as the

remains of the chain whipped around. The jerk of the chain sent Meatlug tumbling through the air, forcing Hiccup to cling to the dragon's face for dear life as they went tumbling out the door.

"Meatlug!" Fishlegs shouted as he watched his dragon fly out the door.

"Hiccup!" Merida yelled as she raced out the door behind them.

It took a moment for Meatlug to regain his bearings as he tumbled through the air, eventually coming to a stop over the tree in the village square. Shaking his head clear, Hiccup turned to look at Meatlug, the dragon looking him in the eye after glancing around wildly for a moment.

"H-Hey Meatlug," Hiccup greeted nervously, "It's alright. You know me. Now let's not do anything-"

Before Hiccup could finish, Meatlug suddenly shot through the air, diving over the village, causing a number of villagers to let out cries of shock and alarms as the dragon flew overhead.

Seeing Meatlug coming as she was passing through the square, Astrid quickly ducked as the dragon shot by, looking up in confusion as she noticed Hiccup clutching the dragon's face.

"Hiccup!?" she shouted as the Meatlug carried him away, "Where are you going!?"

"I have no idea!" Hiccup shouted back, his voice echoing behind him as Meatlug carried him out over the ocean and out of sight.

Standing on the docks, Merida and Fishlegs watched Hiccup and Meatlug disappear with wide eyes, Merida clutching the top of her head in a panic.

"I can't believe him," Fishlegs groaned, "I never thought Meatlug would do something like that."

"Ye cannae believe him!?" Merida asked incredulously as she rounded on Fishlegs and struck him hard in the stomach, "Yer dragon jist carried Hiccup off tae gods know where an' 'at's all ye can think of!?"

"You're right," Fishlegs groaned as he clutched his stomach in pain, "My fault, sorry."

"Ah daenae care who's fault it is, Fishlegs," Merida said, her anger leaving her as cast a worried look back out to the sea, "Ah jist daenae know whit we're gaein' tae dae now."

A/N: Hope you guys liked this chapter, it was a pretty fun one to write. Coming into the beginning of the end for this story, but plenty more to come! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

****Chapter 15: If Only In My Dreams****

"I still can't believe you did this, Fishlegs," Astrid groaned, pinching the bridge of her nose with her uninjured hand as she stood in the boatshed with him, Merida, Snotlout and the twins, "I mean, I thought you were too smart to try and do something like kidnap your own dragon. That's something I'd expect from Snotlout."

"I'm standing right here you know," Snotlout spoke up with annoyance as the twins glanced around.

"I know, I know, it totally is," Fishlegs agreed with a sigh as Ruff caught sight of something in the hay.

"Still here," Snotlout interjected louder than before while Ruff narrowed her eyes at the hay pile before smacking Tuff on the shoulder to get his attention.

"I panicked," Fishlegs continued with a shrug, as Ruff led her brother over to the pile of hay, the two of them looking at it in confusion, "Plus, I'm one hundred percent certain he wanted to stay."

"Ye had tae fight him tae get him in here an' chain him up," Merida pointed out, looking at Fishlegs incredulously as Ruff and Tuff kneeled down and began digging through the hay.

"He flew away the second he got a chance," Astrid added with a matching expression.

"Uh, guys," Tuff said uncertainly.

"Okay, make that seventy two percent certain," Fishlegs amended embarrassedly, prompting Astrid to roll her eyes and smack him lightly on the arm.

"Guys!" Tuff shouted, catching everyone's attention, "Come take a look at this."

Walking over to the pile of hay, the others could see that the twins had uncovered what looked like well over a dozen light blue, scaly rocks.

"Whoa," Snotlout marveled with a chuckle as the group stood over the pile, "Looks like Meatlug barfed up a pile of rocks."

"Ye're such an idiot, Snot," Merida groaned as she kneeled down and picked one up, feeling the warmth inside radiate into her hands, "They're nae rocks. They're eggs."

"Eggs?" Snotlout questioned in confusion.

"Dragon eggs," Ruff added with a smirk.

"Hey wait," Astrid mused as she kneeled down next to Merida to get a better look at the egg the other girl was holding, "I bet that's why the dragons left. It's mating season! They left to lay their eggs!"

"But I thought boy dragons don't lay eggs," Snotlout commented in

confusion.

"Aye," Merida agreed as she looked over her shoulder at Snotlout, "Meatlug is a girl."

The revelation prompted the others to look over at Fishlegs for some sort of explanation.

"Alright look, I've said a bunch of times that I had no idea what gender Meatlug was," Fishlegs explained, "I just guessed he...she was a boy."

Fishlegs paused as a look of realization crossed his features.

"Actually, this explains a lot of things now that I think about it," Fishlegs mused.

"Hey!" Astrid exclaimed happily as she stood up, holding the egg in her good hand, "Everyone's missing their dragons right!?"

"Oh, here it comes," Snotlout grumbled to himself.

"I've got an idea!" Astrid continued as she looked around at the others, holding the egg out for emphasis, "We can give the eggs to everyone as a new Snoggletog tradition!"

"Um, as much as Ah like yer enthusiasm, Astrid," Merida spoke up with an awkward grin as she gingerly reached out and took the egg from the blonde, "Ah daenae think 'at's a good idea."

"Why not?" Astrid asked in hurt confusion.

"We daenae know a lot aboot dragons or their eggs," Merida explained, "Whit if Meatlug came back an' went on a rampage tryin' tae find his, Ah mean, her eggs? An' gods anly know whit Gronckle hatchlin's are like."

"Yeah," Astrid agreed with a sigh as her enthusiasm left her, "I guess you're right."

"What should we do with them then?" Tuff questioned.

"Ah suppose we shud leave them here fer th' time bein'," Merida replied as she lay the egg back down with the others, fluffing the hay around them before standing back up, "'At way Meatlug will know where tae find them when she comes back."

"Hey, that's right!" Fishlegs exclaimed happily, "If the dragons left to lay their eggs, that means they're totally coming back!"

"See," Astrid said as she placed a hand on Merida's shoulder, "Hiccup will be fine."

"Aye," Merida agreed as she looked at her friend, rubbing her arm nervously, "Th' real question is how long will he be gone?"

Meanwhile,

Miles had already passed underneath them by the time Hiccup found the strength to crawl up onto Meatlug's back. Using Meatlug's spines to keep himself steady, Hiccup carefully pulled himself into a seated position at the base of the Gronckle's neck. After shifting around for a few moments, Hiccup settled into a somewhat comfortable position.

"Man, I'm definitely going to have to get working on that saddle for Fishlegs," Hiccup said to himself, though the whipping winds made it hard to hear his own voice. Holding onto Meatlug's spines with his hands, Hiccup dug into the Gronckle's neck with his knees in an attempt to redirect her. Instead, all he got was a snarl from the dragon and an angry shake of the head as Meatlug ignored him and continued onwards.

"I thought as much," Hiccup commented with a sigh, "Looks like I'm going with you, Meatlug, whether I want to or not."

As they continued to travel southwards over the ocean, fog banks began rolling in around them. Soon enough, Hiccup could make out numerous rock formations rising out of the sea below, a sight Hiccup was all too familiar with.

"Oh man," Hiccup groaned, "I hope you're not taking me where I think you're taking me, Meatlug."

Eventually though, the rock spires fell away and the fog began to dissipate. As the fog clouds parted, Hiccup could see they were approaching another small island. The island was circular in shape and largely made of barren rocks. The most striking feature of the island was the large lagoon that sat at its center, occupying much of the island's area, its waters lapping at the sands that surrounded it. Rock outcroppings littered the eastern side of the island and as they drew closer, Hiccup could see dozens upon dozens of dragons sunning themselves upon the hard ground, soaking in the light that penetrated the light cloud of steam that hung over the island. As they drew closer, Hiccup could also make out the remains of some long forgotten ship sat on the shores of the lagoon, it's prow and mast with a tattered sail being all that was left to it.

Swooping down, Meatlug landed on the western shore of the lagoon, allowing Hiccup to slide off her back before she went wandering off towards the other dragons. Looking out over the hazy island, Hiccup could see dragons of all breeds and colors gathered around the steam vents that shot out of the rocky ground. Surrounding them were an untold number of dragon hatchlings, all of them looking like smaller, more colorful versions of their respective breeds.

"You guys come here to have babies," Hiccup surmised aloud as the realization struck him, watching as a mother Nadder fed her young regurgitated fish.

Walking down a slope towards one of the hot springs, dodging around scampering hatchlings as he went, Hiccup noticed a Gronckle rolling its rock-like eggs into the pool of hot water. Leaning down, Hiccup saw a few flashes beneath the water before half a dozen colorful Gronckle hatchlings swam their way to the surface in a flurry of bubbles.

Watching the hatchlings as they scampered towards their parent,

Hiccup saw a few try to buzz into the air before they came crashing down after getting less than a foot off the ground.

"So. you guys can run fresh out of the eggs," Hiccup observed, "But you can't fly."

Glancing to the side, he noticed an egg sitting on the side of the pool.

"Oh hey, look over here," Hiccup said to the Gronckle as he walked over to the egg, not noticing that it was starting to crack and glow red hot, "You missed one."

Right as Hiccup reached the egg, it suddenly exploded into a ball of fire, the force of the explosion knocking Hiccup off of his feet and sending him sailing through the air before he landed on the hard ground with a thud.

Sitting up in surprise, Hiccup watched as the unharmed and smoking hatchling pulled itself out of the remains of its shell.

"Wow," Hiccup said in amazement as the full grown Gronckle wandered over and gave him a curious sniff, "I'm glad you guys don't lay your eggs on Berk."

Picking himself up off the ground and patting the Gronckle on the nose, Hiccup looked around the island, trying to catch sight of a familiar dragon.

"Toothless!" he called out, hoping to catch his dragon's attention as he began to wander down the beach, "Toothless!"

Receiving no reply, Hiccup's face fell as he sighed in disappointment.

"Toothless, where are you?" Hiccup muttered to himself as he continued down the beach. As he walked up a small ridge, a familiar clicking noise caught his attention. Looking towards the source he saw a trio of familiar faces.

"Boudica!" Hiccup exclaimed as the Nadder clicked it's tongue at him again, "Hookfang! Stormfly!"

The other two dragons looked up from tending to what Hiccup could only assume were their hatchlings as the young man raced down towards them, quickly hugging Boudica's snout and earning a friendly chirp in reply.

"You have no idea how happy I am to see you guys," Hiccup said with a grin, before he felt something nibbling at his pants. Looking down, he found a trio of Nadder hatchlings standing at his feet, each a different shade of blue.

"And you have babies!" Hiccup exclaimed happily as he leaned down and pet one of the Nadder hatchlings on the head, "Aww, look at you guys all happy together. Who knew you were leaving to celebrate your own sort of holiday?"

With a sigh, Hiccup stood up and placed his hands on his hips.

"I should get back to my holiday," Hiccup surmised with a nod before turning his attention back towards Boudica, "What do you say, Boudica? Care to give me a lift back home?"

The Nadder chirped happily at him in reply before bending down to allow Hiccup to pull himself onto her back. Quickly settling in at the base of Boudica's neck, Hiccup gave the Nadder a pat on the head to show he was ready, prompting the dragon to lift off into the air.

"I'll see you all back on Berk when you're good and ready!" Hiccup called down to the other dragons as they all watched Boudica fly into the air above them. In response, the older dragons began grunting and chirping at one another as they each took off one by one.

"No no no," Hiccup argued as he shook his hand at the dragons before sighing in defeat, "Looks like I just started the return migration. Well, if you insist."

As the adults flew into the air, the hatchlings quickly gathered together, chirping and screeching after their parents. Looking down, the adults grunted and roared at the hatchlings as they flew out over the ocean, urging their children to follow. The horde of hatchlings raced to a cliff overlooking the sea. After a moment's hesitation, a few of the hatchlings leapt off of the cliff, flapping their wings rapidly to try and get airborne.

"Come on," Hiccup said encouragingly as he watched the hatchlings rise into the air, "You can do it, come on!"

As the hatchlings began to rise into the sky, a strong sea breeze suddenly kicked up, knocking them back up onto the cliff.

"Oh boy, this is never going to work," Hiccup grumbled, as the hatchlings tumbled across the hard earth, "They're not strong enough to fly yet."

Looking back to the adults, he watched them turn back to the island as their children called out to them.

"And you all are never going to leave without them," Hiccup observed as he pat Boudica on her side, "Take me back down, Boudica. I need to think of something."

Landing, Hiccup sighed as he rolled off of the Nadder's back. Placing his hands on his hips, he surveyed the island, looking for anything that he could use to solve the dilemma he found himself in. Spotting the wreck of the ship sitting on the lagoon's shore, his eyes lit up as he quickly made his way over to it.

As he got a better look at the ship, he could see that it was the remains of a Viking longship, the carving of a snarling dragon decorating its prow, the paint having been stripped away by the elements. Walking around, Hiccup could see that the wood was largely sturdy, though the bottom was infested with barnacles. Walking around to the back, Hiccup could see that the ship had been broken in two relatively cleanly.

"Must have hit a rock or something," Hiccup mused as he touched the splintered end of one of the boards that made up the remains of the

ship's hull, "The rest is probably somewhere nearby."

Looking inside the ship, he saw the large open space was largely intact as well, save for bits of water damage here and there.

"We could probably get all the hatchlings in here," Hiccup mused before sighing in annoyance, "But how would we move it. I mean if I had some rope, maybe I couldâ€¦"

After a quick search of the rope, Hiccup discovered that there was not an inch of rope to be found on the wreck.

"No rope, no twine, nothing!" Hiccup growled as he angrily kicked the inside of the boat, "Nothing I can use to get out of here!"

Sighing, Hiccup leaned against the inner hull of the ship before sliding down into a seated position, watching the sun set behind the horizon.

"No way off and Snoggletog is tomorrow," Hiccup said disappointedly, leaning his head against the bulk and closing his eyes, "Happy holidays to me."

Later,

Night had fallen over Berk, casting the island in gloomy darkness that matched the mood of the village. Up in her home, Merida seemed the gloomiest of all. Sitting crosslegged before the fireplace, she looked at Hiccup's helmet gripped in her hands, the polished metal catching the light from the burning fire and reflecting her disheartened expression back at her. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Stoick sitting in one of their wooden chair, absentmindedly studying the contents of the mug he held in his hands.

A sudden knock at the door brought both of them out of their respective thoughts.

"Ah'll get it," Merida said as she lay the helmet down next to the hearth and stood up before walking over to the door and opening it, revealing North standing on the otherside.

"North," Merida said in surprise, "Whit are ye daein' here sae late?"

"_Dobriy vyecher, Printsessa_," North greeted as he took off his hat and held it in his hands, "May I be coming een?"

Merida glanced over her shoulder at Stoick, who nodded to her.

"Sure," Merida said as she stepped aside to let North in, "Come on in."

"_Spasibo_," North replied as he stepped into the house, taking a quick look around as he did, his eyes lingering for a moment on Hiccup's helmet sitting by the fire.

"I take it you're here to tell me that you didn't find my son," Stoick grumbled as he turned his attention back towards his drink while Merida returned to her seat by the fire.

"_Da_," North answered with a sad sigh, "Donner and I looked everywhere, but zere ees being no telling where or how far away ze dragon took heem."

"I thought as much," Stoick stated as he began to drink from the mug.

"I am promising you zough, I veell be out zere first light tomorrow morning," North continued, "I veell be finding Hiccup."

"You do that," Stoick replied as he slammed his mug against the table and stood up from his chair, "I'm goin' to bed. See yourself out."

Without another word, Stoick brushed past North and made his way upstairs, the Rus watching him go with a befuddled expression.

"Daenae take it personally," Merida said, drawing North's attention to her, not taking her eyes away from Hiccup's helmet as she spoke, "Ah think he tries tae masks his pain with anger."

"Everyone ees having zeir own vay, I suppose," North stated as he walked up next to Merida, "Vhat about you, _Printsessa_? Ees zeess being your vay?"

"Ah guess," Merida answered with a shrug.

"Vhy ze helmet?" North questioned as he sat down next to Merida.

"It's stupid," Merida answered with the shake of her head.

"I am zeenking eet ees not," North pressed.

"It's a Vikin' tradition, Ah guess," Merida explained as she held the helmet up, "Ye leave yer helmet by th' hearth on th' eve o' Snoggletog an' come th' mornin' ye discover 'at Odin has left ye saeme goodies."

"Odin heemself, huh?" North questioned with a snort.

"Ah know, it's dumb," Merida agreed with a smirk and a shake of her head as she placed the helmet on the ground in front of her before pulling her knees up to her chest and wrapping her arms around her legs, "Imagine a god or spirit travelin' round th' world tae give everyane gifts."

"Eet ees being unlikely,_ da_," North said as he stood up, picking the helmet up as he did, "But dumb? _Net_, not dumb."

"Whit makes ye say 'at?" Merida questioned as she looked up at North, watching as he placed the helmet on the mantle above the fireplace.

"Ze worldâ€|" North began before pausing to sigh as he placed his hands on his hips, still facing the fireplace, "Eet can be a dark place."

He turned towards Merida before crouching down so that he was eye level with the redhead.

"Zat ees vhy people are needing zeengs like zees," North explained, "Somezeeng that can be eenspiring a sense of...vonder."

"Like th' idea 'at saemeane can deliver presents tae everyone in ane night," Merida surmised with a small smile.

"Exactly," North replied with a nod and a grin of his own, "So, you are seeing. Eet ees not being dumb. Eet ees being good tradition. Eet ees being good holiday. Terrible name, but good holiday."

Merida allowed herself a small chuckle before her face fell again.

"It'd be nice tae celebrate it with everyane Ah love," Merida stated sadly as she looked away from North.

"_Da_," North agreed with a nod and a sad sigh, "Eet can be deeffeecult not being around zose you care for at times like zees."

"Any sign o' Jack?" Merida questioned as she looked back at North.

"_Net_," North replied with a shake of his head, "Do not be worrying zough, _Printsessa_. Jack veell show up when he ees ready."

"Daenae ye hae any way o' findin' him?" Merida questioned, "If ye hae tae follow him sae much, surely ye daenae jist rely on th' other spirits tae tell ye where he is."

"You are being right, _Printsessa_," North confirmed with a nod, "Eef a magi concentrates hard enough, zey can sense spiritual energy. And you'll find zat Jack gives off a lot of spiritual energy."

"Ah suppose he wud," Merida replied before sighing sadly again, "If only Hiccup was 'at easy tae find."

"Eef only," North agreed with a sigh of his own as he stood back up and stretched, "Eet ees being late though. Perhaps ve should be sleeping on eet."

Merida nodded as she stood up and began following North to the door, only to pause as a thought occurred to her.

"Wait," Merida said as North opened the door, the chill of the night air creating goosebumps on her skin, "Whit did ye say?"

"I said," North repeated as he turned to look at Merida as he placed his hat back on his head, his eyes seeming to sparkle in the moonlight, a knowing grin on his face, "Perhaps ve should be sleeping on eet."

"Right," Merida said with a nod, a grin forming on her face as well, "'At's whit Ah thought ye said."

"Sweet dreams, _Printsessa_," North said as he turned and began to walk away.

"Same tae ye," Merida replied as she closed the door before she turned on her heel and rushed up the stairs to her room. After quickly changing into her sleeping gown, Merida crawled into bed and pulled her blanket over her. Merida was so excited by the prospects of falling asleep that she had to force herself to relax. After a few minutes of laying in bed with her eyes closed, Merida felt herself slowly drifting off, which was quickly replaced with what was quickly becoming the familiar feeling of floating through nothing. As soon as she felt warm sand between her toes, Merida's snapped open her eyes and hopped happily in place when she found she was back in the Dreamlands.

"Ole!" Merida called out, cupping her hands around her mouth to amplify her voice, "Ole, are ye there!?"

After a moment, Merida heard the sound of shifting sands before she felt a small tug on her sleeve. Looking down, she found Ole standing next to her, the little spirit waving as he looked up at her.

"Och, Ah'm sae happy tae see ye, Ole!" Merida exclaimed as she kneeled down in front of the spirit, "Ah really need yer help."

Ole quirked an eyebrow at Merida.

"Hiccup, ma love," Merida explained, blushing at the look Ole gave her, "He's lost an' Ah need tae find him. Can ye help?"

Ole smiled warmly at Merida before nodding his head.

"Oh, thank ye sae much. Ole!" Merida cried happily as she reached down and pulled the spirit into a quick hug, "Whit dae we need tae dae?"

As Merida pulled away, Ole help out a finger to signal for her to wait before he snapped his fingers. As soon as he did, the sand around them seemed to suddenly spring to life. Shooting into the air, the sand formed a dome around the two that quickly encased them, forming a sphere of glowing sand around them. As Merida looked around in wonder, some of the sand seemed to fuse together to form a window of glass that let them look outside. A second later, two chairs formed underneath Merida and Ole, facing the window. Looking at Ole, Merida saw a pair of crisscrossing straps extend from the chair before wrapping around Ole, securing him to it. A second later, a pair of straps extended from Merida's chair and secured her as well, startling the redhead.

As sense of unease coming over her, Merida turned her attention back towards Ole in time to see the little spirit grin and give her a thumbs up. The second he did, the pod of sand suddenly rocketed forwards, pushing Merida back against her seat, causing her to scream in surprise as Ole threw his hands up in excitement. Looking out the window, Merida watched as the endless desert of the Dreamlands shot past at breakneck speed, becoming one bright golden blur.

Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the pod slammed to a stop, causing Merida to lurch forward against the restraints. Merida desperately tried to catch her breath as the sand dissolved around her and Ole, leaving them standing on a sand dune once more. Merida stood in a daze, not paying attention to her surroundings until Ole

walked up in front of her and snapped his fingers at her.

"Whereâ€|?" Merida began to question as she blinked her eyes and looked around, "Where are we now?"

Looking around, Merida saw they were completely surrounded by sleepwalking dragons making their way across the constantly shifting landscape.

"Ye...Ye found th' dragons!" Merida exclaimed happily, only for her face to fall as she looked around, "But where is this? Everythin' looks th' same in th' Dreamlands."

Tugging on her sleeve, Ole got Merida's attention before pointing at something in the crowd. Looking in the direction Ole indicated, Merida caught sight of a person walking with the dragons.

"Hiccup?" Merida questioned before her face lit up with happiness, "Hiccup!"

Dodging around the dragons, Merida made her way over to where Hiccup was sleepwalking, Ole hot on her tail.

"Oh, thank goodness, he looks okay," Merida said as she and Ole walked along with Hiccup, "Ah jist wish there was a way Ah cud help him."

Catching Merida's attention, Ole signaled for her to touch Hiccup's head.

"Gae intae his dream?" Merida questioned, "Are ye sure 'at's a good idea? How is 'at gaein' tae help?"

Ole merely glared at Merida and made the same motion more insistently.

"Alright, alright," Meirda replied, "Ye're th' dream spirit. We'll dae it yer way."

Reaching out, Merida touched her hand to Hiccup's head and was immediately overcome with the sensation of falling as her surroundings became a swirl of color. After a few breathless seconds, Merida felt her feet on solid ground as the world around her took on a coherent shape once more.

Looking around, Merida found that she was standing outside of her house on Berk. Spring had come and everything was lush and green once more. Birds chirped all across the island and the smell of fresh flowers filled the air.

As she looked around, Merida could hear the sound of laughter coming from somewhere nearby. Following the sound around the house, Merida let out a small gasp as she saw Hiccup happily playing with Toothless in the field behind the house. Merida leaned against the side of the house, a smile on her face as she watched Hiccup and Toothless playing together. As she watched Merida couldn't help but notice that something seemed different. Merida felt sorrow well up inside her chest as she realized what the difference was.

"Oh gods," she said to herself, "He's got both his legs."

Hearing her voice, Hiccup looked over in Merida's direction, smiling happily as he saw her.

"Merida!" Hiccup called as he ran over to her.

"Hey, Hic," Merida greeted him, discreetly wiping at her eyes before embracing him, "Ah'm sae happy tae see ye."

"Me too," Hiccup agreed as he held her close before pulling away as he took her hand, "Come on, I want to show you a trick I've been teaching Toothless."

"Wait, Hic," Merida said, holding firm as Hiccup tried to pull her away, "Ah need yer help with saemethin'."

"Sure," Hiccup replied as he turned back to Merida and gave her a questioning look, "What do you need help with?"

"Ah need tae know where ye are, Hic," Merida said, looking into Hiccup's eyes as she spoke.

"What are you talking about, Mer?" Hiccup asked in confusion, "We're on Berk."

"Nae, ye're nae," Merida insisted, taking both of Hiccup's hands in hers as she spoke to him, "Ye're with th' dragons. Meatlug took ye away. Daenae ye remember?"

"I...I do remember," Hiccup replied, a look of confusion on his face. As he thought, Merida noticed their surroundings were becoming blurred and less distinct.

"Ah need ye tae show me where Meatlug took ye," Merida urged, "Ah need tae know sae Ah can come find ye."

Hiccup concentrated and Merida suddenly felt weightless again as they lifted off from Berk and went soaring out over the sea, even though the two of them were still standing still, hand in hand. As Merida watched, they flew south out over the ocean and past the misty, rock-strewn sea near the dragon's former nest. Not far from there, they came out of the mist cloud and flew down to the lagoon island before coming to a stop over the wrecked ship. Looking down, Merida saw Hiccup curled up in the remains of the ship, fast asleep.

"I...I don't understand," Hiccup mumbled as the world around them began to fade away.

"Ah dae," Merida stated before she grabbed Hiccup by the shoulders and turned him to face her, "Ah can find ye now, Hic. Ah'm coming tae get ye."

Leaning in, she pressed her lips against his before embracing him.

"Ah love ye, Hic," Merida whispered in his ear.

"I love you-" Hiccup began to say before his eyes suddenly snapped open and he found himself sitting upright in the wreck of the

longship that he had taken refuge in the night before. His arms were outstretched, grasping onto nothing but empty air.

"...too," he muttered to himself, standing up and looking around in confusion as the sun began to rise up over the horizon.

Meanwhile, back on Berk, Merida sat upright in her bed, smiling as she saw the morning light starting to shine through her window.

"Daenae worry, love," Merida declared as she threw off her blanket and hopped out of bed, "Ah'm comin'."

A/N: Another fun chapter to write. Hope you guys like the twists I put on the original story. As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

16. Lost and Found

Chapter 16: Lost and Found

Flakes of snow and ice kicked up in Merida's wake as she rushed down the hill dressed in her winter clothes with her quiver and bow slung around her back, her cloak whipping behind her in the crisp air. Racing down into the village, Merida looked around wildly, trying to find someone. She was so busy spinning in place and looking around that she accidentally bumped into Astrid as the blonde walked up with Fishlegs.

"Och, sorry," Merida apologized as she caught herself, "Didnae see ye there, Astrid."

"It's fine," Astrid replied, looking at Merida with concern, "Everything alright?"

"Ah'm lookin' fer North," Merida explained as she continued to look around as she talked to them, "Have ye seen him?"

"I think I saw him up by the house he's been staying in," Fishlegs replied uncertainly.

"Great!" Merida declared as she began running in the direction of the house, leaving a stunned Astrid and Fishlegs behind, "Thanks!"

Astrid and Fishlegs watched Merida run away before glancing at one another.

"We should probably follow her, shouldn't we?" Fishlegs questioned.

"Yeah," Astrid agreed with a sigh as she began jogging after Merida, "Come on!"

Following Merida as she ran towards where North was staying, Astrid and Fishlegs came to a stop in front of the house as Merida was rushing out.

"He's nae here!" Merida declared as she began looking around wildly,

"Where is he!?"

"Look!" Fishlegs declared as he pointed to a nearby cliffside, "Up there!"

Looking in the direction that Fishlegs was indicating, Merida could see North standing with Donner on one of the many cliffs that marked the divide between land and sea on Berk. As Merida watched, she saw North begin to mount Donner.

"North!" Merida called up to the cliff as she began racing towards it, waving her hands above her head in an effort to get his attention, "North, wait!"

Before Merida could reach him or get his attention, North urged Donner forward and the reindeer leapt off the cliff before soaring into the air.

"Damnit!" Merida swore as she stomped her foot against the ground in aggravation.

"Merida, what's going on!?" Astrid demanded as she and Fishlegs ran up behind her.

"Ah figured oot where Hiccup was an' North was ma ane chance o' gettin' tae him taeday!" Merida growled as she grabbed her hat and pulled it as far over her head as she could in frustration.

"Wait, what!?" Astrid questioned, shaking her head as she looked at Merida in confusion, "How could you possibly know that!?"

"Ah...It's a long story," Merida replied uneasily as she pulled her hat back up and turned to face Fishlegs and Astrid, "But Ah dae know an' hae nae way o' gettin' him back home. He's gaein' tae be stuck there all day at least. He's gaein' tae miss Snoggletog."

"Hey, it's okay," Fishlegs said as he walked up to Merida and put a comforting hand on her shoulder, "You know where he is and you know he's safe. That's good."

"It cud be better though," Merida argued sadly, "Ah jist want him here. Ah want all o' them back here where they belong."

"We all do, Merida," Astrid said as she gave Merida a small, sad smile, "Sometimes it just doesn't work out that way."

"Ah know, it's jist sae frustratin'," Merida replied as she clenched her teeth in irritation, "If Ah jist had saeme way o' reachin' him Ah cud-"

Before Merida could finish, she shuddered visibly as she let out a ragged breath that came out in a white puff.

"Are you okay?" Fishlegs questioned as both and Astrid looked at Merida in confusion.

"Aye, Ah think sae," Merida replied as she shivered again, looking at the others in confusion, "Didnae ye guys feel 'at?"

"Feel what?" Astrid asked in confusion.

"It was like a cold wind blowin' through ma whole body," Merida explained before realization struck her, "Ah've felt this afore."

"What are you-" Fishlegs began to question before Merida held up a finger and shushed him.

"Ah need tae concentrate," Merida explained before lowering her hand and closing her eyes. A quiet fell between the three of them as Merida concentrated. After a few moments, Merida began to feel something she had never felt before. She could feel something radiating cold both inside and outside of herself.

"Ah can feel him," Merida spoke, her voice barely above a whisper, blind to the fact that her eyes had become a more vibrant shade of blue than they normally were.

"Feel who?" Astrid questioned, looking at Merida with a perplexed expression.

"Jack Frost," Merida explained before whipping her head to the side to look at the forest at the edge of the village, "He's close. Come on!"

With that, Merida turned and raced towards the forest, leaving Astrid and Fishlegs to watch her as she left with the same confused expressions.

"Have I mentioned that I hate magic?" Fishlegs questioned.

"You and me both," Astrid agreed before reaching back and taking Fishlegs' hand in hers, "Now, come on. She might need our help."

Running through the woods, Merida came to a stop among a grove of pines, looking around for any sign of Jack Frost.

"Where are ye?" Merida muttered to herself as Fishlegs and Astrid came crashing into the grove from behind her.

"Merida!" Astrid called as Fishlegs tried to catch his breath behind her, "What's going on?"

"Ah'm tryin' tae find Jack," Merida explained as she continued to scan the surrounding pines.

"How do you plan on doing that?" Fishlegs questioned, "Can't he turn invisible?"

"Ah can...feel his presence," Merida replied as she looked over at Fishlegs and Astrid.

"You can feel his...presence?" Astrid questioned, quirking an eyebrow at Merida.

"It's...hard tae explain," Merida answered, "All Ah know is 'at he's close."

"How close?" Fishlegs asked cautiously.

Wordlessly, Merida held her finger up to her lips before unslinging her bow and notching an arrow on the string. Carefully, she pulled the string back as she closed her eyes and concentrated. Suddenly, Merida spun around and fired the arrow up into the branches of one of the trees. A second before it struck the tree, Jack suddenly reappeared standing on one of the branches directly in the arrows path, which he managed to snatch out of the air a mere inch from his face.

"Whoa," Fishlegs muttered as Merida lowered her bow and looked up at Jack.

"I guess North taught you a new trick," Jack surmised as he twirled the arrow between his fingers as he leaned against the trunk of the tree, looking down at Merida impassively, "What do want?"

"Ah need yer help," Merida answered as she slung her bow back around her shoulders.

"You have a funny way of asking for it," Jack commented as he tossed the arrow aside, "Why do you want my help?"

"Because ye're th' anly ane who can help me," Merida replied as she sighed, "Dae ye mind comin' doon here sae Ah can actually talk tae ye?"

"Fine," Jack grumbled before he stepped off the branch and landed in front of Merida, kicking up a small cloud of snow with the impact.

"Where hae ye been, Jack?" Merida questioned as she crossed her arms.

"Here and there," Jack replied with a shrug before quirking an eyebrow at Merida, "What does it matter to you, anyway? Don't you hate my guts? Don't you all hate my guts?"

"We daenae hate yer guts, Jack," Merida argued with a tired sigh, "'At fight was as much our fault as yers. People make mistakes."

"Some more than others," Jack muttered as he looked away from her, though Merida still managed to catch it.

"Hiccup told me whit ye told him," Merida stated, causing Jack to whip his head to glare at her, "He told me whit happened between ye an' Princess Elsa."

"That wasn't his story to tell," Jack growled as he took a step towards Merida while Astrid and Fishlegs shared a confused glance.

"Ah'm surprised ye actually think Hiccup keeps things from me," Merida stated stoically, unphased by Jack's hostility.

"Where is old Spitup anyway?" Jack questioned, glancing around to try and spot the Viking in question.

"He...He's nae here," Merida replied as her expression waiver and she

looked away from Jack, "He was taken."

"Taken?" Jack asked in surprise as he looked back at Merida, "Taken where? By who?"

"By my dragon," Fishlegs spoke up, looking away and scratching the back of his head as he spoke.

"Wait, what?" Jack questioned in confusion, a perplexed look on his face as he turned his attention towards Fishlegs, "I thought all of the dragons had left."

"Fishlegs here decided to imprison his dragon so it couldn't leave," Astrid explained as she placed a hand on her hip and shot the young man a disapproving look, prompting him to look away from her in embarrassment. Looking at Jack, Fishlegs saw the amused, questioning look the spirit was giving him and quickly decided the best course of action was to look at his own feet.

"Look, it's not my proudest moment, okay?" Fishlegs grumbled as he tapped his foot against the frozen ground.

"'At's why Ah need yer help, Jack," Merida explained, bringing Jack's attention back to her, "Ah need ye tae gae tae Hiccup an' bring him back."

"Why me?" Jack questioned, giving Merida a suspicious look, "I'm sure North would be more than willing to help you out. Why not ask him?"

"Trust me, Ah thought o' th' same thin'," Merida replied as she crossed her arms, "But North already left tae try an' find Hiccup."

"I'm confused," Jack stated as he gave Merida a perplexed look, "Isn't that the exact thing you wanted him to do?"

"Yes, except he daesnae know where Hiccup is," Merida explained, "Ah dae."

"You do?" Jack questioned as he quirked an eyebrow at Merida, "How do you know that?"

"A relative o' yers helped me find him last night," Merida elaborated.

"The Sandman," Jack surmised, "Explains why you know where he is but couldn't get to him."

"Right," Merida agreed with a nod, "'At's where ye come in. Ah need ye tae fly tae where Hiccup is an' bring him back."

"Okay, now why would I do that?" Jack questioned with a snort, "After all, North has to come back eventually. You can just tell him then and he can do it himself."

"Ye'd dae it because it's th' right thin' tae dae," Merida replied as she narrowed her eyes angrily at Jack, "It's Snoggletog an' Hiccup deserves tae spend it with his family."

Jack paused as he looked over at Merida, their cold blue eyes locking for a moment before the spirit looked away again and sighed sadly.

"Look, Carrot Top, my heart goes out to you, it really does," Jack said as he turned away from her, "But I'm not going to be of any help to you."

"Are ye sayin' 'at because ye cannae actually help me?" Merida questioned, a keen edge to her voice, "Or because ye're too scared tae?"

Jack turned back around so quickly the air swirled around him, causing Fishlegs and Astrid to take a half step back in surprise. Merida stood her ground, the hem of her cloak and the ends of her red hair dancing in the cold wind, unphased by the icy glare Jack was giving her.

"Ah'm guessin' it's th' latter," Merida stated as the wind died down.

"Seeing as your boyfriend went running his mouth, I had thought I wouldn't have to spell this out for you, but I guess I was wrong," Jack practically growled, "When I'm around, one way or the other, people get hurt, whether I want them to or not. You've seen that first hand, Red."

"Ah've also seen th' good ye can dae," Merida retorted.

"Like what?" Jack questioned with a dismissive snort.

"Ye've been helping Hiccup learn tae control his blessin'," Merida provided.

"I also almost got him killed," Jack argued, "I can show you the crater if you want."

"Yeah, well how about the other day?" Fishlegs spoke up, "In the village square."

"What about it?" Jack questioned as he looked over at Fishlegs.

"You cheered everyone up," Fishlegs explained, "You went out of your way to make everyone happier and it didn't seem to me like anything went wrong."

Jack didn't anything in reply, merely glancing away with a lost look on his face.

"Ah understand whit happened tae ye back then, Jack," Merida said as she stepped forward and carefully placed a hand on Jack's shoulder, "It must hae been terrible fer ye. But ye cannae let th' past hold ye back like this."

Slowly, Jack turned his head to face Merida, their blues eyes meeting once more.

"Ah know as well as anyane how much yer mistakes can hurt," Merida stated as she gave Jack's shoulder a gentle squeeze, "But ye have tae learn from them nae run from them. Wasnae it ye 'at said ma problem

was lettin' ma guilt eat me up inside? Pot calling th' kettle black?"

"I thought I was the one who was supposed to be able to look through people, Curly Q," Jack stated with a small smile, "No fair pulling the same trick on me."

Merida chuckled as she gave Jack a smile of her own.

"Sae, will ye help me, Jack?" Merida questioned hopefully as she pulled her hand back.

"Well, I had a whole day of brooding planned out for the day," Jack replied with a dramatic sigh, "But I guess I can reschedule."

Merida let out a small squeal of delight as she jumped forward and pulled Jack into a hug, knocking the air out of the spirit as he looked down at her in surprise.

"Thank ye," Merida whispered as she hugged Jack tightly, "Thank ye sae much."

Slowly, the look of shock on Jack's face dissolved into a smile as he gave Merida a small hug back.

"No problem," Jack said as Merida pulled away, "All I need from you now is to point me in the right direction and I'll go pick up your boy."

"It's an island southeast o' here," Merida explained, pointing in the direction, "Ye fly until you hit th' mist an' rocks, then keep flyin' until ye find a small island with a lagoon an' hotsprings. 'At's where Hiccup an' th' dragons are. It turns oot, 'at's where they gae tae mate."

"Alright," Jack stated with a nod, "I think I can handle that."

With that, Jack began to rise into the air on a gust of wind, looking down at the others as he flew.

"You should all probably head back to the village and enjoy your day!" Jack called as he rose higher and higher, "I'll have Situp and your dragons back before sundown!"

"It's Hiccup!" Merida called after Jack.

"Yeah, whatever," Jack replied dismissively before he shot into the sky and out of sight.

Flying southeast, Jack skimmed over the water, the sea kicking up white foam as the air rippled in his wake. Seeing the clouds of mist forming on the horizon, Jack powered forward, shooting through the air like a comet. Dancing between the rocks that rose out of the churning sea like a leaf on the wind, Jack made his way through the fog bank. Reaching out, Jack grabbed hold of a rock outcropping with the end of his staff and used his momentum to spin himself to the top. Landing gracefully on the tip of the rock, Jack peered at his surroundings, looking for any discernable landmark in the swirling mists.

"Alright, so I found the mists and the rocks," Jack sighed as he looked around, "Now I just need to find the island."

After a few more moments of looking, Jack groaned and threw his arms up in defeat.

"I could have used some more precise directions, Red!" Jack called out into the fog, his voice echoing off the surrounding rock. As his voice faded, a loud roar came from somewhere nearby. Whipping his head around, Jack looked in the direction the roar had come from, his eyes narrowing as he tried to make anything out in the fog banks. A moment later, another roar came from closer and Jack's eyes widened in surprise as something came lunging out of the mist at him.

Backflipping away, Jack landed gracefully on a nearby rock as the creature slammed into the rock the spirit had been standing on and quickly scrambled on top of it. Reorienting himself, Jack looked over to see Toothless sitting on the rock he had been standing on moments before.

"Hey, I know you!" Jack declared happily as Toothless gave him a look of disappointment, "What? Am I not who you were expecting?"

Toothless snorted as he looked away, perking his ears up as he scanned the fog much like Jack had been doing moments before.

"What are you looking for?" Jack questioned, leaning to the side as he tried to catch Toothless' eye, "Shouldn't you be on the island with all the other dragons?"

Toothless continued to ignore Jack as he let out another roar, flapping his wings in agitation. As Jack watched, a thought occurred to him.

"You know when I was on the island, I noticed dragons of all shapes and sizes," Jack mused as he sat down on the rock while he watched Toothless, "But I didn't see any others like you."

The words seem to hit home with Toothless as his wings and ears drooped.

"Yeah, I know that feeling," Jack said sympathetically, "I don't know where to find any dragons like you but I know where to find the next best thing."

Toothless perked up at this, turning to look at Jack quizzically.

"You know that island your dragon buddies are honeymooning on?" Jack questioned as he stood up, straightening his cloak as he did so, "Well, the little guy you let ride on your back managed to get himself stranded there and I was on my way to go pick him up."

Toothless' eyes widened in surprise.

"You want to tag along?" Jack asked as he indicated behind him with his thumb, "I've actually managed to get myself turned around so if

you wanted to take the lead" | "

Before Jack could finish, Toothless shot into the air with a flap of his wings, the fog parting in his wake.

"...I'll follow," Jack finished with a smirk before he shot into the air as well, following behind Toothless.

Quickly catching up with Toothless, Jack rocketed through the fog with the Night Fury. After a few moments of flying, the two of them shot out of the fog and into the air once more. Looking ahead, Jack could see an island nearby that matched the description Merida had given him.

"Alright, nice job!" Jack called out to Toothless before he sped forward in a burst of wind, "Race you there!"

Toothless roared after Jack as the spirit laughed while flying down towards the island. As he approached the island, Jack saw the dragons looking up at him. Squinting his eyes, Jack could make out the sight of Hiccup standing on the shores of the lagoon, looking up at the spirit as he shot towards the ground. Leveling out as he approached the ground, Jack skidded across the surface of the lagoon, kicking up a wave as he went. As he reached the shore, Jack skidded to halt, splashing water on Hiccup as he did so.

"Agh!" Hiccup cried as he back peddled in surprise, water dripping from his hair and his clothes, "Jack! What are you doing here!?"

"And a happy Snoggletog to you, Teacup," Jack replied with a smirk, "And to answer your question, I'm here looking for you."

"How did you find me?" Hiccup questioned as he shook the excess water off of his clothes.

"Your girl dreamed a little dream about you and told me where you were," Jack explained as he turned to look up at the sky, "Plus, I got some directions from a friend of yours."

Following Jack's gaze, Hiccup's face lit up with happiness and excitement as he saw Toothless flying down towards them.

"Toothless!" Hiccup exclaimed happily, running over to the dragon as he landed a few feet away, "Hey, bud!"

Toothless grunted happily at Hiccup as the young man ran up and wrapped his arms around the Night Fury's neck before pulling the dragon close, feeling the warmth radiate of his black scales.

"Well, ain't that a sweet sight?" Jack questioned as he smiled and leaned on his staff.

"Bad dragon!" Hiccup declared half-heartedly as he stepped away and shook his finger at Toothless, "Very bad dragon! Do you know how worried I was!?"

"I'm pretty sure he did," Jack spoke up with a chuckle, "But sometimes, when nature calls, you have to answer."

"Any luck out there, pal?" Hiccup asked as he pat Toothless on the head, earning only a sad grunt in reply, "Don't worry, Toothless. We'll find a girl out there for you."

"Speaking of which, your girl is waiting for you back on Berk," Jack said as he walked up next Hiccup, "We shouldn't keep her waiting."

"I appreciate you coming to find me, Jack," Hiccup said as he continued to pet Toothless, "But I can't leave."

"Sure you can," Jack replied with a chuckle as he indicated towards Toothless, "I even brought you a ride."

"That's not what I mean," Hiccup stated with a good natured smile and a shake of his head as he turned to look at the dragons gathered on the island, "I can't leave them behind. They deserve to celebrate Snoggletog at home as much as I do."

"Well, they can come too," Jack replied, not understanding what the problem was, "I'm not picky."

"They can't leave, Jack," Hiccup explained, "The hatchlings aren't strong enough to fly on their own yet and the adults won't leave without them."

"Ah," Jack stated in understanding, "I see the problem now. Any ideas?"

Sighing, Hiccup sat on a rock, petting Toothless' head as the Night Fury laid it down on his lap. Hiccup smiled down at the dragon before lifting his head up and looking around the island. As he did, Hiccup's eyes fell on the ruin of the longship sitting on the lagoon's shore once more. Looking at it, something in Hiccup's mind clicked and a smile spread across his face.

"You know what?" Hiccup said, grinning as he looked back at Jack, "As a matter of fact, I do."

A/N: So, after this chapter, there should be one more before the end of this story. Hope you guys have all been enjoying it and that you guys like the next one! As per usual, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

17. Chase the Wind

Chapter 17: Chase the Wind

"Come on, Jack!" Hiccup called over his shoulder, a Gronckle hatchling tucked under each of his arms, Toothless walking next to him with a third hatchling in his mouth, "We're losing daylight!"

"This isn't exactly easy, Pushup!" Jack shouted back from the other side of the island as he tried to keep a small group of hatchlings moving forward in front of him, reaching out and hooking a Nadder hatchling with his staff as it tried to scamper away, "It's like herding cats!"

The three of them made their way down to the shores of the lagoon where the remains of the longboat sat, a large group of dragons gathered around it, ushering their hatchlings into the hold of the ship.

"Alright, that's the last one" Jack declared as he tossed the Nadder into the squirming, chirping mass of hatchlings in the hold before them, "Now what?"

"Now, we sail it home," Hiccup answered as he walked towards the ship.

"Sail it home?" Jack questioned, looking at the back of the young man's head like he was crazy, "I hate to break it to you, Teacup, but we don't have enough boat for that."

"That's where you come in," Hiccup replied as Toothless helped boost him up onto the deck of the ship, "I need you to make a bunch of ice all around the ship. Like it's trapped in an iceberg."

"I suppose that will make it float," Jack agreed with a nod, "But icebergs aren't exactly known for their speed."

"That's why we need this," Hiccup said as he grabbed one of the ropes dangling from the ship's limp sail and pulling it taut and tying it down.

"Using your powers we can make our own wind and sail this thing all the way to Berk in no time," Hiccup went on as he finished securing the sail, the washed out canvas dotted with small holes.

"Well, I can't say that I have a better plan," Jack stated with a shrug, "Let's give it a shot."

Twirling his staff in his hand, Jack pointed it at the ground in front of the ship before a burst of frigid air shot from the end of his staff and quickly created a thick sheet of ice upon striking the ground. Making his way around the ship, Jack encased the bottom of it in ice, causing it to sit a few feet off of the ground. Stepping behind the ship, Jack swung his staff at it, creating a large gust of wind that sent the frozen ship skidding across the ground and splashing into the lagoon where it bobbed in the water. The sudden movement caused Hiccup to lose his footing and fall to the deck with a cry of surprise as the hatchlings began chirping and screeching loudly in the hold below.

"Warn me next time you're thinking about doing something like that!" Hiccup shouted as he picked himself up.

Jack smiled and shrugged helplessly in reply before leaping from the shore to the boat, landing noiselessly on the deck.

"Everything ready?" Jack questioned as he rested his staff on his shoulder.

"As it will ever be," Hiccup answered, looking at the adult dragons as they restlessly watched from the shore.

"Alright!" Jack declared as he walked towards the center of the deck,

stopping directly in front of the mast as he twirled his staff in his hands, "Hold on to something!"

Hiccup had a split second to grab hold of the ship's deck railing as Jack swung his staff at the mast, creating a gust of wind that sent the boat skipping across the surface of the lagoon. The ship lurched forward as the sail caught the wind, nearly knocking Hiccup off balance again. After taking a moment to regain his footing, Hiccup turned and glared at Jack.

"What?" Jack questioned with a laugh as he noticed Hiccup's glare, "I warned you that time."

Hiccup grumbled and rolled his eyes, prompting Jack to laugh again as he swung his staff a second time, creating a gust that sent the ship sailing out of the lagoon and into the open waters of the North Sea.

Glancing back towards the island, Hiccup saw Toothless and the rest of the adult dragons rise into the air, the sun glittering off their scales in a brilliant array of colors. As Hiccup watched them, the spirit-made wind whipping through his shaggy auburn hair, he noticed the flock start to turn in a different direction than the one the ship was heading in and a few of the dragons had started to turn towards them and roar in irritation and frustration. Realization striking him, Hiccup turned and looked at Jack, watching as the spirit gleefully and blindly battered the sail with blasts of frosty wind.

"Jack!" Hiccup shouted, catching the godlings attention over the howling of his gale, "Where are we going!?"

Jack blinked in surprise as he looked around at the open water that surrounded them before grinning at Hiccup and shrugging.

"I don't know," he admitted, "But we're making great time!"

Groaning and rolling his eyes, Hiccup stumbled away from the railing and grabbed one of the ropes holding the sails down and giving it a sharp tug. The shift in the sails caused it to catch the wind differently, forcing the ship to turn

"Follow the dragons!" Hiccup ordered, pointing towards the creatures in questions as their position aligned with their path.

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!" Jack replied as he gave Hiccup a mocking salute, earning another roll of the eyes from the Viking. Walking over to the edge of the ship, Hiccup leaned over and looked down into the open hold to check on the hatchlings. The infant dragons were more active than Hiccup would have liked, hopping and bouncing off one another as the ship skipped across the waves, sprays of salt water splashing against the ship and the ice.

As Hiccup watched, his blood suddenly went cold as he watched as a few hatchlings tumbled out of the hold and onto the ice. As he scrambled down from the deck, Hiccup watched as a baby Nadder stood up and began wandering towards the edge of the ice, shaking its head dizzily as it went. Hustling across the ice, Hiccup reached down and scooped up the Nadder before it could wander off the side.

Unfortunately, Hiccup's feet found no purchase on the slick ice. his momentum sending him sliding towards the edge with the Nadder hatchling in tow. As the two of them let out screams of fear, the Nadder began to beat its tiny wings rapidly, carrying it into the air as high as Hiccup's reach would allow, the young man's hands clasped tightly around the dragon's mid-quarters. As the Nadder continued to try and fly back towards the ship, it managed to generate enough momentum to spin Hiccup around and stop him right as he was leaning over the edge of the ice, leaving the Viking balancing precariously on his metal foot while his other foot kicked wildly in the air over the cold, churning waters beneath it.

With a final squawk of effort, the Nadder managed to yank Hiccup and itself forward, sending the two tumbling across the ice before they came to a stop with Hiccup on his back and the Nadder laying on his chest.

"Thanks, little buddy," Hiccup said breathlessly, patting the Nadder on the back as it tried to catch its breath, the other hatchlings gathering around them, chirping in excitement, "I owe you one."

"Hey!" Jack called from the deck, "What's going on down there!?"

"The hatchlings are getting too wild!" Hiccup shouted back, "If we don't find a way to corral them, some of them could fall in the water!"

"That would be bad," Jack surmised as he blasted the sail with another gust of wind, "Any ideas!?"

"I don't know!" Hiccup shouted back before a thought came to him, "Sometimes Merida sings to them!"

"Maybe that would work!" Jack yelled "What songs do they like!?"

"I don't really know!" Hiccup replied with a frustrated sigh, grabbing the tail of a Nightmare hatchling and yanking it back towards the ship, "They're Highlander songs, I don't know all the words!"

"Well, we've got to try something!" Jack shouted, "How do they go!?"

"I think one goes something likeâ€¦" Hiccup paused as he ran a hand through his hair, trying to collect his thoughts, "_When the cold wind is a callin'_"

"Oh! Oh!" Jack exclaimed, "I know this one! I love this one!"

"...You do?" Hiccup mumbled in confusion as he looked up towards the deck as Jack began to sing.

"_When the cold wind is a callin',_" Jack sang, the winds around him amplifying his voice, "_And the sky is clear and bright_"

"_Misty mountains sing and beckon_" Jack continued as he followed

the dragons towards the fog enshrouded area near their former nest, pillars of rock rising out of the swirling cloud around them, "_Lead me out into the light!_"

As Jack sang, the dragon hatchlings began to quiet as they turned their attention towards the source of the music.

"It's working!" Hiccup exclaimed, watching as a few of the adult dragons swooped down and began to fly alongside the boat so they could listen to Jack's singing, the young man reaching out to scratch Toothless's neck as the Night Fury glided next to the ship, "Keep it up!"

"_I will ride, I will fly!_" Jack declared as the boat sped through the water, dancing between the rocks with grace and ease, "_Chase the wind and touch the sky!_"

"_I will fly!_" Jack continued as the ship skipped across a wave, hanging in the air for half a second, causing the hatchlings to squeal in delight as Hiccup let out a cry of alarm before the boat dove back into the water and went speeding along once more, "_Chase the wind, and touch the sky!_"

"_Na na, nana, na na,_" Jack sung as the ship disappeared into the mist, the spirit's voice bouncing off the surrounding rocks as it was carried away by the wind, "_Na na, nana, na na na!_"

_Meanwhile, _

The sun had begun to set over the island of Berk, painting it with golden yellows and light oranges that were at odds with the evergreen that covered most of the village. A sense of cheer prevailed through the village, undermined by the feeling that something was missing. On a cliff that overlooked the harbor, Merida stood watching the horizon, her hands knotted together with a look of worry on her face, Varis perched on her shoulder, his black eyes looking out to the sea as well.

"How long have you been out here, _Printsessa?_" North questioned from behind Merida, causing the young woman to jump in surprise, having not heard the large man approaching, causing Varis to caw in alarm and ruffle his feathers. Recollecting herself, Merida turned to look at North before sighing and shrugging.

"Do you not zeenk you should be coming eenside?" North asked, a concerned look on his face, "Eet ees growing cold and eet ees being varmer eenside."

"Ah'm alright," Merida answered, wrapping her arms around herself and shivering while Varis puffed up his feathers to keep warm, "Plus, Ah think Ah've had enough Snoggletog cheer fer th' evenin'."

"He ees going to be coming back, you know," North said, walking up next to Merida and watching the darkening horizon with her, "Jack veell be breenging heem back."

"Ah know," Merida replied with a nod, "Why else dae ye think Ah'm standin' oot here?"

This response did not seem to cheer North as he looked back at Merida with a sad expression.

"I could go looking again, eef you would be liking thees," North said, "Now zat ve are knowing where he ees, maybe I can be helping as vell."

"Nae, North," Merida replied as she turned to face the Rus and lay her hand gently on his arm, "Ye've already daene more than enough."

North sighed and looked at the ground in defeat, not noticing the look of confusion on Merida's face as she turned her attention back towards the horizon, Varis giving a questioning caw as she did.

"Still, I-" North began to say but he was interrupted as Merida held up a finger and shushed him.

"Dae ye hear 'at?" Merida asked, her brow furrowed as she tried to ascertain what she was hearing.

"Hear vhat?" North question in confusion, "I don't...vait..._da,_ I do hear somezing...Ees zatâ€|?"

"...Singin'?" Merida finished, equally perplexed, "Wait a moment. Ah know this song!"

"_Where dark woods hide secrets,_ " a voice sang as it was carried over the whole island by the wind, "_And mountains are fierce and bold! Dark waters hold reflections of times lost long ago!_"

"Look!" Merida exclaimed, pointing at something moving on the darkening water as Varis cawed loudly and flapped his wings, "Saemethin's comin'!"

"Zat ees not all zat ees coming!" North declared as he pointed towards the sky, "Look!"

Looking in the direction that North was pointing, Merida's face lit up with a smile as she caught the unmistakable sight of dozens upon dozens of dragons flying towards the island.

"Th' dragons!" Merida shouted, loud enough so her voice carried across the whole village, "They've brought th' dragons back!"

A murmur seemed to go through the whole village, their curiosity peaked by Merida's call. Curiosity quickly turned into enthusiasm and excitement as, one by one, the villagers spotted the dragons returning to the island.

"_I will hear their every story, take hold of my own dream!_" Jack declared as he ran towards the front of the ship, balancing on the figurehead carved in the shape of a snarling dragon and thrust his staff forward, creating a gale that pushed their ship towards Berk, "_Be as strong as the seas are stormy, and proud as an eagle's scream!_"

"We're getting pretty close, Jack!" Hiccup shouted as he looked at the rapidly approaching docks, "Maybe we should slow down!"

"_I will ride, I will fly! Chase the wind and touch the sky!_" Jack continued to sing, ignoring Hiccup as they raced towards Berk, "_I will fly! Chase the wind and touch the sky!_"

"Jack!" Hiccup screamed as he gripped the deck rail tightly, the villagers who were now watching from the dock beginning to move away as a whisper of fear went through the crowd.

"_Chase the wind! Chase the wind!_" Jack sang as people began to run from the docks with cries of panic. Suddenly, the ship hit a smooth rock that was jutting out of the water near the shore line, the stone working like a ramp to launch the speeding boat out of the water and into the air.

"_Touch the skyyyy!_" Jack called as they flew over the docks and the surrounding buildings before hanging for a moment in the air, backlit by the red, setting sun as Jack held the note. Then, the moment passed and the frozen ship went falling back to Earth, Hiccup shouting in terror as they fell. The boat landed in the village square with a crash, the ice lining its bottom shattering, the impact sending hundreds of ice shards skidding across the cold, hard ground in every direction. The remains of the ship ground to a halt at the base of the great pine tree at the center of the square, the ship's boards groaning painfully as it came to a stop.

There was a quiet moment as the villagers rushed into the square before stopping a safe distance from the wreck. Merida hesitantly stepped forward, looking around worriedly for either Jack or Hiccup, neither of whom were anywhere to be seen.

Abruptly, Jack leapt from the wreckage and landed back on the dragon figurehead, smiling jovially as if nothing had happened at all, his staff planted on the figurehead with one hand while the other hand rested on his hip.

"Happy Snoggletog!" Jack shouted before the hold of the ship cracked open like an egg, sending the dazed horde of hatchlings spilling out onto the ground in a cacophony of squawks and squeals. A second later, the adult dragons descended on the square and the crowd cheered in delight as each of the villagers went racing to their dragon.

"Stormfly!" Astrid cried happily as he Timberjack slide over to her and nuzzled her with his nose, prompting the young woman to wrap her good arm around his snout in a one-armed hug, "You came back!"

Suddenly, three Timberjack hatchlings, each a different shade of green, descended on her wrapping their serpentine bodies around her in an effort to be the one that cuddled her the most.

"And you brought babies!" Astrid squealed in delight as she pulled the hatchlings closer while Stormfly watched happily.

Growling as he dug through the wreckage of the ship, Toothless reached down and grabbed hold of Hiccup's cloak with his teeth before yanking the young man up and out of the boat and setting him back down on unsteady feet.

"Thanks. pal," Hiccup said, patting the Night Fury on the head as the dragon climbed down to stand next to him.

"Hiccup!" Merida exclaimed as she crashed into the young man and wrapped her arms around him while kissing him, her greeting almost knocking them both to the ground, but Toothless was quick enough to steady them with his tail, "Ah was sae worried about ye!"

"I know, I'm sorry," Hiccup apologized, as he held her close, and buried his face in her hat-covered hair, breathing in the scent of her with a smile, "I missed you."

"Ah missed ye too," Merida stated as she pulled away before giving Hiccup a lingering kiss, the young man smiling dreamily as she pulled away.

"Hiccup!" Stoick called as he walked over, a bright smile on his face, "Son!"

Before Hiccup could react, Stoick reached down and wrapped his powerful arms around Merida and his son, the Highlander laughing joyfully as the Viking chief picked them up and hugged them.

"Oh, I'm so happy to have you back, son," Stoick said as he set Hiccup and Merida down again.

"It's good to be back, Dad," Hiccup replied with a smile as he looked around the crowd and spotted Jack standing apart from the others, smiling contently, "Though it wasn't without help."

"Indeed," Stoick agreed with a nod as he looked over at Jack as well, "Frost!"

His eyes widening in surprise, Jack turned to look at Stoick, as the chief made his way through the crowd towards him. For a moment after reaching him, Stoick merely stood over Jack, looking down at the increasingly uncomfortable spirit. Then, slowly, a small smile spread across Stoick's face before he reached down and put one of his large hands on Jack's shoulder.

"Thank you for what you did," Stoick said, his voice barely above a whisper, a look of sincerity on his face, "For bringin' back our dragons. For bringin' back my son."

"It's not a big deal," Jack replied with a deflecting shrug, looking at the ground in embarrassment, "It was the princess who figured out where they were and it was your son who figured out how to get us all back. I just did the leg work."

"So, that was you," Hiccup said to Merida as the two of them walked up next to Stoick.

"Aye, it's a new trick Ah've been learnin'," Merida answered with a shrug.

"Seems theres a lot of perks to being a magi," Hiccup observed with a smile.

"There are," Merida replied, smiling as she slipped her hand into Hiccup's, "But they're nae th' best perks tae bein' me."

"Oh gods, would you two get a room?" Jack groaned, prompting Merida to shoot him a glare.

"Jack, ye hae th' uncanny ability tae get under ma skin even when Ah'm happy with ye," Merida growled at him.

"It's part of my charm," Jack replied with a smirk as he lazily leaned on his staff.

"Still, Ah really shud thank ye again," Merida as he face softened into a smile, "An' daenae bother tryin' tae sell yerself short again. We wuldnae hae this withoot ye."

"Fine, I guess that's true," Jack admitted as he shot Merida a sly look, "But I wouldn't have done it if someone hadn't convinced me that I could be pretty good at helping people if I put my mind to it."

Jack's words brought a warm smile to Merida's face.

"What was that about?" Hiccup whispered as he leaned down towards Merida, smiling at the redhead.

"Ah'll tell ye later," Merida answered with a smirk.

"Yes, I believe this has been enough talking for now," Stoick said before he turned to address the gathered villagers, "Now, we go to the Great Hall to celebrate our Snoggletog!"

A cheer went up through the crowd as they began making their way towards the Great Hall, a few of the villagers reaching down and lifting Jack up onto their shoulders, carrying the bewildered spirit along as Merida and Hiccup laughed in amusement.

Later,

Night had fallen over Berk but the Great Hall was bright with light and cheer. The villagers laughing and drinking with one another as their dragons wandered about, watching happily as their hatchlings played and ate.

"Hey, Merida," Fishlegs spoke up from his seat on one of the many benches at one of the Hall's long tables, "Do they have any songs for the Highlander winter holiday? Hogman?"

"Hogmanay," Merida corrected with a smirk from where she sat on the same long table, her feet resting on one of the benches, stroking the scales of one of Boudica's hatchlings as it lay curled up in her lap while Varis sat perched on her shoulder, "An' yes, there are."

"Let's hear one!" Astrid called from her seat next to Fishlegs, one of Stormfly's hatchlings laying draped around her neck, fast asleep, "Teach us how one goes."

"Well, th' most popular ane is probably Auld Lang Syne," Merida replied thoughtfully.

"Auld Lang Syne?" Snotlout questioned from his position next to

Merida, where he sat straddling the bench, "What the Hel does that mean?"

"It means 'Times Gone By,'" Merida explained, "Hogmanay is th' end o' th' year festival in th' Highlands, an' we sing th' song tae bid th' auld year farwell."

"How does it go?" Hiccup questioned, sitting next to Merida on the bench, his back leaning against the table and one hand resting on the young woman's knee, the other scratching the back of Toothless' head as the Night Fury laid it on his lap.

Merida smiled down at Hiccup before taking a breath as she started to sing.

"_Shuld auld acquaintance be fergot an' ne'er brought tae mind_?" Merida sung, her friends' attentions focused solely on her, "_Shuld auld acquaintance be fergot an' days o' auld lang syne?_"

"_Fer auld lang syne, ma dear,_" Merida sang as the hatchling in her lap perked up while a few of the other dragons turned their attentions towards her, "_Fer auld lang syne._"

"_We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,_" Merida continued, her singing slowly catching the attention of the dragons and villagers in the Hall, "_Fer days o' auld lang syne_."

As Merida sang, Hiccup glanced through the crowd and noticed Jack leaning against the wall near the great door to the Hall, smiling at the young man.

"_We twa hae run aboot th' braes an' pu'd th' gowans fine_, " Merida sang as Hiccup stood up and made his way through the crowd over to Jack as the villagers began to gather around his friends, Toothless following behind him, "_But we've wander'd mony a weary fit, sin days o' auld lang syne_."

"I thought you were done with this loner thing?" Hiccup questioned with a smile as he reached Jack.

"_We twa hae paidl'd i' the burn, frae mornin' sun til dine._"

"It still has its advantages," Jack shrugged with a sly grin of his own.

"_But seas between us braid hae roar'd sin days o' auld lang syne._"

"So, what's the plan now?" Hiccup asked as he leaned against the wall next to Jack.

"_Fer auld lang syne, ma dear._"

"What do you mean?" Jack questioned as he quirked an eyebrow at Hiccup as he pat Toothless on the head, "I thought you wanted me to hang around so that I could help with this whole end of the world thing."

"_Fer auld lang syne_."

"We do need your help with that, but we've got time," Hiccup replied, "I think there's something you should be doing before that."

"_We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet, fer days o' auld lang syne_."

"What are you getting at, Teacup?" Jack asked, confusion written across his face as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"_An' surely ye'll be yer pint-stowp!_"

"Have you ever thought of going back to Arendelle?" Hiccup questioned solemnly.

"_An' surely I'll be mine!_"

"Are you drunk?" Jack questioned sharply, narrowing his eyes at Hiccup, "After everything I told you, you have to understand that I can't ever go back there."

"_An' we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet, fer days o' auld lang syne._"

"Haven't you learned anything from all this, Jack?" Hiccup questioned in return, "You can't let your mistakes hold you back. You can't be afraid."

"_An' there's a hand, ma trusty fiere!_"

"This is different," Jack stated as he turned away from Hiccup, "This is so much different."

"_An' gie's a hand o'thine!_"

"Is it?" Hiccup pressed, stepping in front of Jack so the spirit had to look at him, "Fifteen years is a long time, Jack. She's a different person now."

"_An' we'll tak a right gude-willy waught, fer days o' auld lang syne._"

"What's it matter to you?" Jack said quietly as he looked up at Hiccup.

"_Fer auld lang syne, ma dear_."

"You're my friend, Jack," Hiccup explained as he reached up and placed a hand on the spirit's shoulder, "And my friends matter to me."

"_For auld lang syne._"

"You really think she'll forgive me?" Jack questioned, a look of hope slowly forming on his face.

"_We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet, fer auld lang syne._"

"I've learned a lot of things over my life," Hiccup stated, "But the most important thing I've learn is that there's a chance you'll fail if you try something, but you're guaranteed to fail if you don't

try."

"_Fer auld lang syne, ma dear._"

"You and your girl are just full of advice today, aren't you?" Jack questioned with a smile.

"_Fer auld lang syne._"

"What can I say," Hiccup replied with a shrug, "We like to help."

"_We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet fer auld lang syne._"

"Alright," Jack said with a nod, his excitement growing, "Alright! I'll do it!"

"You veell be doing vhat?" North questioned as he walked up to them, a mug of mead in his hand as Merida's singing ended, "Vhat are you two talking about?"

"Me and my buddy here were just talking about how it's probably time for you and I to be moving along," Jack explained.

"Moving along?" North questioned in confusion, "Ve need to be preparing for ze return of Pitch Black. Ve can not be leaving. Where ees eet you are vanting to go?"

"...Arendelle," Jack admitted, giving Jack a nervous smile.

"Arendelle?" North questioned in shock, almost spilling his drink in the process, "Arendelle!? Jack, you are knowing ve can not be going back to Arendelle!"

"Do you know that, North?" Hiccup spoke up, "Fifteen years is a long time. Wounds heal."

"And zey also leave scars," North replied solemnly before turning his attention back to Jack, "Eef ve return, ze king veell-"

"Th' king o' Arendelle is dead," Merida interrupted as she walked up to join them.

"Vhat?" North questioned in shock as he turned to face Merida.

"Th' king an' queen died when their ship sank coming up on three years ago," Merida explained sadly, "Elsa is gaein' tae be coronated soon, from whit Ah understand. Why are ye all talkin' about this?"

"Your boyfriend convinced me that I should make a trip to Arendelle, to see if I can make up with Elsa," Jack explained, "I was trying to convince North of the same."

"Hiccup's right, ye shud gae," Merida said as she turned to address North, "Though nae fer th' same reason."

"Vhat reason zen?" North questioned.

"From whit Ah've seen an' heard o' other blessed, Elsa is likely quite powerful in her own right," Merida explained thoughtfully, "Both her an' her kingdom wud be good tae have on our side if whit's comin' is as bad as ye say. Speakin' o' which, if Pitch Black truly has somethin' sinister in mind fer Jack, then he probably will be after Elsa too."

"We have to go then, North," Jack said, a look of panic on his face as he reached out and grabbed the sleeve of North's coat, "I can't let this...thing get his hands on Elsa."

"Ve von't be letting him." North said resolutely, "For ve veell be going to Arendelle to speak with ze _Printsessa_."

"Great!" Jack exclaimed happily, as he turned his attention towards Hiccup, "I don't remember the last time I was this excited!"

"I'm happy I could help," Hiccup stated with a small smile of his own.

"You did a lot more than that," Jack replied, giving Hiccup a genuine smile, "I would have never thought of going back if I hadn't met you, Hiccup."

"It'sâ€¦|" Hiccup began to say as a look of realization crossed both his and Merida's faces, "Hey, you got my name right."

"Of course I did," Jack replied with a shrug and an impish grin, "What kind of jerk would I be if I purposefully got your name wrong."

Hiccup sighed and rolled his eyes, causing Jack to chuckle.

"Seriously though, thank you," Jack said, reaching out and putting a hand on both Hiccup and Merida's shoulders, "Both of you."

"Daenae worry about it, Jack," Merida said with a shake of her head.

"Yeah, that's what friends are for," Hiccup added.

"I like the sound of that," Jack said, hesitating for a moment before pulling the both of them into a hug. Hiccup and Merida were caught off guard for a moment before they happily returned the hug, Varis squawking from his perch on Merida's shoulder.

"Tell the others I said bye, will you?" Jack asked as he pulled away.

"Wait, you're leaving now?" Hiccup questioned in surprise.

"No time like the present, right North?" Jack inquired as he hit the Rus playfully on the arm.

"_Da,_|" North agreed with a thoughtful nod, as he set the mug he had been holding down on a nearby table, "Ve veell be needing to make a few stops along ze way, so eet may take us some time to get to Arendelle."

"All the more reason for us to get a headstart," Jack stated.

"Ah cannae believe ye're already leavin'," Merida said, "It feels like ye've only just arrived."

"The wind comes and goes," Jack replied with a shrug, "But it always comes back. Until we meet again, Merida."

"Until then," Merida answered with a smile and nod.

"I'm happy to see that Hilde's good traits got passed along," Jack said as he held his hand out to Hiccup, "I'm happy to call you my friend, Hiccup."

"I'm happy to be your friend, Jack," Hiccup replied as he shook Jack's hand with his burnt one, warmth and cold seemingly radiating off their clasped hands for a moment.

"Take care," Jack said as he patted Hiccup on the arm with his free hand before pulling away, "Sorry, I'll miss the wedding. Try not to get too wild on the honeymoon, we don't need you knocking her up just yet, alright?"

Jack laughed as Hiccup turned crimson as Merida glared at him, the spirit backing away towards the door as North stepped in between them.

"Do not be minding him," North chuckled, "You are knowing how he ees."

"Aye," Merida groused as she crossed her arms, Varis ruffling his feathers to match her mood, "All too well."

"Both of you be keeping up your training while I am away," North said, "And be zanking your father for his hospitality. Zees was quite a vonderful holiday."

"I will," Hiccup replied.

"Thank ye fer all o' yer help North," Merida added, earning a smile and a nod from the Rus as he made his way towards the door as well.

"And with that, we slip quietly away into the night," Jack said as he opened the Hall door and stepped out into the night.

"Indeed, old friend," North agreed, closing the door as he nodded to Hiccup and Merida one last time, "_Do svidaniya_."

And with that, they were gone.

"This has been a crazy holiday," Hiccup sighed with a shake of his head as he scratched the top of Toothless' head again.

"Ye're telling me," Merida chuckled, "When dae ye think we'll see them again?"

"Sooner rather than later, I hope," Hiccup stated, a touch of worry in his voice, "I think we're going to need them for what comes next."

"Let's nae worry about whit comes next, love," Merida said as she looped her arm around Hiccup's and turned the young man back towards the celebration going on in the Hall, "Let's worry about right now."

"Let's," Hiccup agreed, smiling as they began walking back towards their friends and family, Toothless trailing behind, "That was a very nice song, by the way."

"Thank ye," Merida replied with a smile of her own.

"I think I'd like to learn it," Hiccup stated, "How does it go again?"

"_Should old acquaintances be forgot, and never brought to mind_" Jack sang softly to himself, his bare feet crunching in the fresh snow that now covered the ground. Glancing up, Jack smiled as he saw great snow clouds rolling in from the North, snowflakes dancing on the chilled wind that ruffled his cloak.

"_Should old acquaintances be forgot, and days of auld lang syne_" Jack continued as he began racing across the ground, his light feet leaving no footprints as he took a flying leap off one of the cliffs.

"_For auld lang syne, my dear_" Jack sang as he pulled up just before hitting the water, the sea water spraying him as he flew just above the crashing waves.

"_For auld lang syne_" Jack went on as he glanced back, smiling as he saw North riding Donner off one of Berk's cliffs and went sailing through the air.

"_We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet_" Jack sang as he flew upwards from the sea and pieced through the snow clouds that covered the sky, revealing the glittering heavens above. The moon hung directly in front of Jack, full and bright in the clear and crisp night air,

"_For days of auld lang syne_" Jack finished softly before dropping back beneath the clouds, leaving the moon floating alone, it's pale light lovingly illuminating the night.

A/N: And that's the end of this story. Hope you guys liked it, despite it being a bit on the shorter side! Thanks again for all your support, you all are the best readers and reviews a writer could ask for. Next on the slate will probably be finishing Seven Days in Corona and then starting on a small side story I'm thinking of naming The Legend of Gobber the Belch. Let me know what you think! As always, feedback and critiques are always welcome, so please review! Later!

End
file.